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DOMESTIC DIVINITY:

OR,

A copious Collection of

SERMONS,

SELECTED

From the polite Writers and sound DIVINES,

of the present Century;

For the use of

SCHOOLS and FAMILIES.



God gave the Increase.

1 Cor. 3. 6.

L O N D O N :

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TO HIS GRACE
THE MOST REVEREND
JOHN MOORE, D.D.

BY DIVINE PROVIDENCE,
LORD ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY,
PRIMATE AND METROPOLITAN OF ALL ENGLAND,

THIS COLLECTION OF SERMONS,

DESIGNED TO PROMOTE
THE BEST PURPOSES OF THE CHURCH,
OVER WHICH HE PRESIDES,

IS INSCRIBED,

WITH UNFEIGNED RESPECT,

BY

HIS MOST HUMBLE SERVANT,

THE EDITOR.

ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE

R E A D E R.

THESE Sermons are presented to the Public, with some degree of confidence, not indeed arising from any pretensions to merit on the part of the Editor; but from the respectable characters of those whose united labours furnish the Collection. They are presented as the accumulated wisdom of cultivated understandings and pious hearts; a wisdom sanctioned by the high authority of Revealed Religion, and exempt from the extravagancies of fanatical folly.

The Authors, indeed, speak so strongly in their own favour by their works; and, for the most part, are so well known to Fame, that a prefatory recommendation of them may be entirely superseded. It would not be difficult to cite, after the example of the Editors of the Classics, an abundance of *Testimonia Auctorum*, in praise of most of them. The characters of their works might be transcribed from the accounts of their lives. The excellencies of their style, their sound learning, their skill in expounding Scripture, their pious spirit, and their moderation, would furnish ample topics of just praise. But the cause is so good, that it may be trusted

to itself without an advocate. The Authors plead for themselves with sound argument and powerful eloquence; and the Reader may be safely left to receive the impression which they give, unbiassed by previous commendation.

In general, it may be allowed to say, that most of them were men highly honoured in their day, and considered as Preachers of singular excellence even in learned and philosophical congregations, at the same time that they were popular in the mixed and crowded audiences of the *great city*. They were learned and solid without dullness; popularly eloquent, yet not superficial. To apply the words of Ecclesiasticus to them, "they were men giving counsel by their understanding, and declaring prophecies; leaders of the people by their counsels, and, by their knowledge of learning, meet for the people; wise and eloquent in their instructions; honoured in their generations, and the glory of their times."

There are certainly many more than those included in this Volume, to whom the highest commendation is due. For the omission of these, no apology will be required; as it is evident, that, within the limits of a single Volume, they could not all be admitted. Some are so popular, as to be already in the hands of almost every Reader of Sermons; and therefore would have been inserted here to little purpose. Many, though excellent in their matter, are yet antiquated in their diction. Others are so recent, as not to admit of selection from them, without the appearance of an unjust violation of property.

It is presumed, that no injurious liberties of this kind have been taken. Many of the Volumes, from which the Sermons have been selected, were gradually falling into an undeserved oblivion, from which this attempt may contribute to rescue them. Their venders will probably find an increase, rather than a diminution of their sale, from the favourable specimens here exhibited. And as to the general propriety of theological compilations, the Bishop of
Llandaff

Llandaff has set an example of them in his Six Volumes, which might fully justify it, if it wanted vindication.

It is perhaps unnecessary to dwell on this topic. The principal purpose of this Advertisement is to specify some of the reasons which induced the Editor to think, that such a compilation might be extensively useful.

It must always happen, either from indisposition, distance of residence, or inclemency of weather, that many serious persons will be prevented from attending places of worship, and religious instruction, on the days consecrated to devotion. For these, "*Domestic Divinity*" is particularly calculated.

It is reasonable to suppose, that many pious persons, who traverse the great deep, confined to a narrow habitation, where they can never hear the cheerful chiming of their parish bell, must wish to employ a part of the day appointed for meditation, in reading good Sermons; and that a Volume, containing a great variety at a moderate price, must to them be highly acceptable.

It is the custom of many families to employ a part of the Sunday evening in the reading of a Sermon. To all such, a Collection, in which a great choice is presented, cannot fail of being found convenient.

At Schools, there is no doubt but that such a book will be singularly useful.

It may be added, that to Young Students in Divinity, a Collection of Sermons, exhibiting a great choice of good models, may be beneficial.

It is very certain, that the age is misrepresented, when it is said to have no taste for Sermons. Sermons have, in this age, been better received than many books professedly written for amusement. And I believe it may be truly said, that many Sermons in this Collection yield not, in solid merit, to the most popular,
 b 2 though

though some of them had not the good fortune to be generally noticed at the time of their Publication.

The comprehension of a great number of Sermons in one Volume, the cheapness of that Volume, the respectable characters of the Authors: these are the circumstances on which the Editor relies for the good reception of the compilation; and he dismisses it with satisfaction arising from a persuasion, that, by causing a cheap and very copious Volume of Sermons to be extensively circulated, he is serving the cause for which all Churches must have been instituted, more effectually, than by any official activity in a local appointment, or by any theological Work of his own composition.

PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE.

On the Prejudices entertained against Instruction by Preaching.

THERE are many opinions on subjects of the utmost importance, which the young mind adopts by chance, and receives as established truths, without examination. At an age when the faculties are immature and unable to discriminate, a casual association of ideas unites in the same chain, truth and falsehood, error and rectitude. But the mistakes admitted in the infantine period, grow with our growth, and while we are unconscious of their increase, acquire a degree of strength which too often renders them utterly immoveable.

These opinions thus formed and fostered without reason or consideration, constitute those groundless decisions of the mind, which are called prejudices, and which operate on all the subsequent transactions of life.

There is nothing of which the enemies of Christianity are so apt to accuse its friends as of prejudices. They attribute an humble and reverential acceptance of the Gospel to the prepossessions of early youth. To the same cause they ascribe many moral and christian duties, and have sometimes shewn that they would not be reluctant to exterminate all virtue and all religion by fixing on them the odious appellation of inveterate prejudice.

But it is certain that these pretended enemies to prejudice are powerfully actuated by the very errors which they censure. They condemn Christians without hearing with patience, or considering with

candour the merits of their cause. Indeed there is too much reason to think, that many have rejected the Scriptures, and consequently all the doctrines derived from them, who have never bestowed on the books which contain them a single perusal. At a time of life when all impressions are deep and permanent, they heard some silly witticism or sophistical argument, tending to deride or to invalidate the Christian Religion. They immediately concluded that its doctrine was contemptible and its proofs unsupported, and could never afterwards prevail upon themselves to give it a due examination.

Upon so slight causes are many induced to reject a religious system of the highest importance. Similar prepossessions, acquired by the most fortuitous circumstances, have prevented persons of careless minds from receiving improvement from the instructions which are delivered from the pulpit. In the hour of social merriment and in the company of trifling and vicious persons, it is not uncommon to render every thing ludicrous which is connected with the seriousness of religion. When any part of the conversation is to be stigmatized as dull and not worthy of attention, it is compared to a *Sermon*, because it is serious. Nothing can throw greater contempt on any part of the discourse, than to give it the name of preaching. Sermons, or preaching, are indeed in the eyes of many who appear to themselves, and would appear to others, men of brilliant and lively parts, synonymous with all that is tedious and disagreeable. The *foolishness of preaching* * is so generally allowed among the gay and the careless, that though they in a peculiar manner want the good effects of it, they are rendered incapable of receiving them by their puerile prejudices.

Many would give attention to a discourse under the title of an oration or moral essay, who would immediately prepare to sleep or to depart, if you should announce the very same composition under the title of a Sermon. If indeed we were to form a judgment from the appearance of some congregations, or of some families during the recital of a Sermon, we might frequently conclude, that a Sermon is in reality, what it is often ludicrously called, a most powerful soporific.

Indeed, from the absurd prejudice that dullness is essentially and inseparably the property of a Sermon, it has happened in some places,

* IT PLEASED GOD BY THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING TO SAVE THEM THAT BELIEVE. (1 Cor. i. 2.)

that

that Sermons are become little more than matters of form. Many go to the Churches on Sunday, and sit under the pulpit, with the same habitual formality as they put on their best apparel, on that day, merely in compliance with a general custom. If a conscientious master of a family reads a sermon at home, how often do the hearers remain in a state of dormant insensibility? or, though they should lay so much restraint on themselves, as to resist the tendencies to sleep, how often do they display marks of weariness, and seem to consider the long and tedious hour as a species of religious penance?

But as it is certainly true, notwithstanding all the efforts of ridicule, that both as Christians and as men, we may derive unspeakable advantage from Sermons properly attended to; I shall endeavour to offer a few such considerations as may contribute to remove unreasonable prejudices against instruction by sermons. I hope it will appear, that the *foolishness of preaching* (as it is called in mockery by the wicked) may contribute to make men wiser than the wisdom of this world, even wise unto Salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ.

The efficacy of preaching and the utility of Sermons are abundantly evinced by actual facts; by proofs which the wit of the scorner is not able to invalidate. The good characters and beneficent actions, which have been produced by them, are evidences of their utility, which no talent for ridicule can destroy.

Oral instruction possesses indeed peculiar advantages. Human nature is so constituted, as to catch emotions and affections by a kind of contagion. The voice, the aspect, the gesture of the Orator enforce his arguments with wonderful efficacy. Eloquence even in civil and political business, where the objects are little, compared with religious Truth, has been found to be a most powerful engine in controlling and directing the wills of mighty nations. In religion, whose objects are splendid and important, above all that the world is able to display, eloquence has produced the most stupendous effects on the minds of the auditors. It has been the means of opening hearts, which, being hardened by sin, were closely shut against the entrance of light and life. It has penetrated to the very soul; roused it from the slumber of death, and taught it to aspire at, and probably obtain, life eternal. Glorious fruits of sacred Oratory, far more noble and excellent than any yet produced

in the world by worldly grandeur, by imperial power, by military valour, or by proud philosophy. *For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow; and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart* *. The word of God, as administered by the humble and faithful servant of Jesus Christ, has produced, in the microcosm of man, a new Creation. It has renovated his nature, corrupted and lost as it was by the fall of Adam. It has built him up again in Jesus Christ, and made him, by regeneration, a new creature.

It will certainly appear, on a candid review of the subject, that Preaching may be in these times, as it always was, one of the most effectual methods of national reformation. The poor have the Gospel preached unto them; the poor, who in the eyes of our common Father, who is in Heaven, are at least equally estimable with the most opulent potentates who glory in earthly grandeur. But the poor are certainly the most numerous part of the human race. Their poverty frequently precludes the possibility of instruction, in the ordinary modes of a comprehensive education. How shall they believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how shall they hear without a Preacher? Whither shall they repair for light to lighten their native darkness? The Philosopher is perhaps deeply engaged in metaphysical contemplation, and cannot stoop to the humble office of instructing the poor. The rich are engaged in the enjoyment of their riches. Where then, I repeat, are these children of God, but outcasts of men, to seek instruction in morality and in truths which lead to faith in Christ, and from faith to immortality? Behold the Church openeth her door, and the Preacher lifteth up his voice. Enter in, ye sons of distress, ye objects of scorn and neglect, enter in, and let the word of God descend into your hearts by faith with thanksgiving. Attend constantly to the instructions of the Pulpit, and ye may soon arrive at a wisdom which leads to Salvation, and which will render you even in this life far wiser and happier than the wretched Worldling, who, swelled with the bubble of his own importance, looks down upon you with contempt. Were not the excellent institution of preaching established, ye might have perished in a state of ignorance, like that of the savage; or in a state of religious insensibility, like that of the beasts who perish. But thanks be to God, *the Lord gave the word, and great*

* Hebrews, iv. 12.

is the company of the preachers *. *The labourers have not been few* †—
may the heavenly harvest be plentiful !

Thus if it were only for the sake of instructing gratuitously those who stand most in need of gratuitous instruction, of cultivating the minds and morals of those on whom the welfare and virtue of a community much depends, the institution of preaching would be justly esteemed, by every competent judge, of infinite value to Society.

But the rich and learned are often poor and ignorant in a religious sense. And it would be injurious to suspect that instruction from the pulpit is not necessary, or at least highly advantageous to them, and indeed to men of all ranks and of every denomination. *For whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise* ‡, they are most forcibly recommended by the discourses of Christian Orators.

If any are so wise as not to want information, yet all are so weak as to require admonition. We are apt to forget the duty which we understand and of which we allow the obligation. We are apt to contract habits of indolence, and to become cold and languid in performing the offices of social and religious duty. We want a stimulus to excite us, a memorial to remind us of those obvious duties which we neglect solely from a tendency to sloth, and from natural infirmity. What then can be better adapted to keep alive, even in the most enlightened among us, that quick sense of duty which is necessary to its due performance, than persuasives from the pulpit, frequently repeated after short and regular intervals ? There is no danger of his falling asleep who suffers himself to be called to duty by the faithful watchman. He will not often lose sight of Heaven, who earnestly seeks to be directed thither, by the friendly voice of the Christian Preacher. Exhortation animates and encourages even those who are best acquainted with the reasons and extent of their various duties, to perseverance in discharging them. The will requires the instigation of persuasive eloquence more than the intellect. Few are utterly unacquainted with that which is right ; but all are deficient in reducing their knowledge to practice. Let not, therefore, the proudest votaries of

* Psalm, lxxviii. 11. † Matth. ix. 37. ‡ Phil. iv. 8.

science scorn the words of the sincere preacher; for though they may not receive from him increase of knowledge, they cannot fail, if they give due attention, to be confirmed in their resolutions. The sublimest Philosophers are sometimes led to lose sight of those humble virtues which adorn the Christian, and occasion the sweetest comforts, and most useful practices in human life.

There is one virtue, which I will venture to affirm is more forcibly recommended in Sermons than in any works of human composition. It is charity, *the very bond of perfectness*. It is benevolence improved into actual beneficence. It is that glorious expansion of heart, that universal love, which at the same time that it comprehends the whole human race, stimulates to kind acts and friendly offices towards every individual who wants assistance, and to whom we are able to afford it. Take a view of the country which we inhabit. Behold the edifices raised for the alleviation of every species of distress which can fall to the frail inheritors of mortality. Honourable as they are to our country, to Christianity, to human nature, I hesitate not to pronounce, that most of them owe their establishment and flourishing condition to the powerful persuasion of evangelical oratory. Illustrious monuments of a species of eloquence unknown in the Tribunals and Senate Houses of Greece and Rome; but which has most gloriously illuminated and embellished the countries of Christendom. An eloquence, which soaring above the petty contests of property and politics, endeavours to cause an approximation of human nature to the nature of Him who sitteth on the throne of grace, and whose property is always to shew mercy.

Is there any species of distress to be relieved? any Seminary for the poor, Hospital for the afflicted, Asylum for the orphan, Dispensary for the sick, contribution for prisoners, for sufferers by fire, by inundation—to be raised, supported, recommended? the Ministers of the benevolent Gospel ascend the Pulpit; and illustrating by their eloquence the precepts of their lord and master, Jesus Christ, draw from the hands of those who would else take little notice of distant distress, the most munificent benefactions.

After such considerations, none it is hoped will presume to deny the efficacy of preaching, or to depreciate the value of Sermons by controverting their utility.

I proceed,

PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE

IV

I proceed, in the second place, to evince that Sermons deserve attention not only from the good they have abundantly produced and will always contribute to produce, but also from their excellence as compositions distinguished by profound learning, acute ingenuity, beauty of style, and persuasive eloquence.

What, indeed, are Sermons, but moral discourses, authenticated, illustrated, and confirmed, by the sanctions of revealed Religion? Why then should they, who would eagerly listen to a moral discourse, refuse their attention to a Sermon? They must undoubtedly be influenced by those unmanly prejudices which I have already reprov'd: and are foolishly deterred by a name, to which they have taken an unreasonable disgust.

But let us dispel this mist; let us break these bonds asunder. We shall be amply rewarded for the effort. It will clear our view, and emancipate us from the slavery of a prepossession, which suffers us not to drink at a pure and copious fountain of improvement and delight. When the film of a prejudice, equally illiberal and low, shall be removed from our eyes, we shall immediately discover beauties in those despised Sermons, which we had given up as worthy the attention of none but those superannuated matrons, whom we quietly suffer to seek comfort during the cold season of age, the winter of life, in the imaginary warmth of a superstitious devotion.

Persons who are introduced to the Ministry of the Gospel, are in general prepared for it, by a polite and comprehensive education. They have been conversant with the finest models of eloquence, those which were produced in the polished ages of antiquity. They have brought to the study of theology the elegance of Classical acquirements. Their discourses will therefore be found to exhibit many graces and excellencies, which, considered only in a critical or literary light, cannot fail to please every mind which is not rendered insensible to their charms by want of faith, and by established prepossession.

If it were consistent with the present design, it would be easy to enumerate the names of men who have done distinguished honour to literature, by the composition of Sermons. Their conspicuous merits have made them known to fame; and therefore the enumeration, if it were at present expedient, is not necessary. But I will take the liberty of asserting,
2 that

that he cannot pretend to the character of a general scholar, who has not bestowed some part of his attention, in the course of his studies, on the compositions of our English Divines, some of whom are the best writers in the language.

In the great number and variety of Sermons which have appeared within the present and the last century, many will be found adapted to every diversity of taste. *There is milk for babes in Christ, and strong meat for them that are of full age**, even for those, who, *by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*†. Men of warm imaginations and men of austere judgments, men of taste and men of philosophical acuteness may find their peculiar propensities amply gratified. In Sermons preached before learned audiences, such as the Universities, or at lectures established for peculiar purposes, such as those of Boyle and of many others, are to be found signal instances of strict reasoning, deep learning, and acute remark. And while the scholar and philosopher seeks and finds improvement in these, there is a still greater abundance of others on practical subjects, suited to every capacity, to every condition, and every event of human life. Such indeed is the number of Sermons in possession of the public in our own country alone, that the most studious reader can never be distressed for variety of entertainment, or for instruction adapted to his exigencies.

I have thus endeavoured to display as far as the limits of a prefatory discourse will admit, the actual utility and the intrinsic excellence of pulpit discourses; of those important addresses to the heart, and understanding, which point out the way to Heaven and animate us in the progress; the genuine effect of which is often lost by the baneful influence of narrow prejudices. I now proceed to represent the necessity of acquiring a taste for devotional writings, and to suggest a few hints which may lead to the acquisition.

With respect to the necessity of a taste for devotional writings, it is certain, that he who is totally destitute of it cannot be sincere in his profession of Christianity. He may, for the sake of decency or from motives of convenience, outwardly conform to rules and ceremonies; but his heart is a stranger to true religion. *Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* He who neglects the opportunities of hearing that word explained or enforced is deficient in faith.

* Heb. v. 12.

† Romans, x. 17.

Supposing, however, that he is really desirous of being what he professes, and would shudder at the idea of adopting infidelity, yet he incurs great danger of losing the little grace, with which he is at present blest, by neglecting or despising the words of the Preacher. Pious books, and especially sensible and judicious Sermons, contribute greatly to keep alive in the heart the holy flame of heavenly love. He indeed who delights in religious duties as he ought, and indeed must, if he is sincere, will naturally take a pleasure in perusing the best books on subjects of piety. It will require no great sagacity to discover that these are the discourses of those celebrated Preachers who are justly and generally esteemed able teachers of sound doctrine.

If our pride and self-sufficiency induce us to believe that we stand in no need of instruction from the Pulpit, it is absolutely necessary to our spiritual welfare that we immediately divest ourselves of them. Humility and a teachable disposition are indispensably required even by the greatest adept in human learning, if he wishes to make a valuable proficiency in *the knowledge which leadeth to Salvation.*

He who means to cultivate in himself a relish for devotional writings and devotional employments, must not only attend the Church at the stated times to hear the living voice of the Preacher, but must also seek in the retreat of his closet the instruction of proper books, and principally of Sermons. He must deliver himself from the vulgar prejudice that they are dull and insipid. They are only so to those whose powers of spiritual perception are deadened by sin, by neglect, by disbelief, by the desertion of the Holy Spirit; a tremendous case, which their contempt of pious writings and of holy meditation will prolong and aggravate. They are not aware that by ridiculing the Ministers of the Gospel, and by deriding their discourses with the levity of witticism, they are most effectually promoting their own condemnation.

I will take occasion from what has been already said, to infer the expediency of reading Sermons aloud on the Lord's day, and on other solemn occasions, for the improvement of children and servants in private families. It has been said that though many of us are inclined to infidelity ourselves, yet none of us chuse that our dependants should affect the same liberty. We cannot help paying a faint compliment to Christianity, in confessing by our conduct that it has a tendency to make honest servants,

vants, dutiful children, and to preserve domestic comfort. If then the enemies of Christianity are ready to allow this, how zealous should its friends be in displaying and diffusing effects so greatly beneficial!

The morals of the age are said to be peculiarly corrupt. The appeal, as a proof, is made to the thefts and murders which abound more than ever among the lower classes; and to the debauchery, extravagance, and irreligion which stigmatize the age among the higher. What can tend more immediately to stop the overflowing of iniquity than the diffusion of moral and religious instruction? And how can this be done more effectually than by the authority of Fathers and Masters of families? Instruction from the Pulpit in the Church is too often considered as merely a matter of form; but when it is confirmed by the example and the precept of a Father and a Master, it displays its fullest efficacy.

The father of a family, the *Paterfamilias*, when he conscientiously watches over the conduct of his dependants, is a most respectable character, and effects in the Community, what cannot be effected by Laws and Magistrates either municipal or ecclesiastical. Let every master be the chaplain of his own family. Let due honour and attention be paid to the word of God, as it appears in the Scriptures themselves, and as it is illustrated by the eloquence of Divines, and the public happiness will immediately receive an unspeakable augmentation. The morals of the people will be purified in the fountain, even in their hearts; and the blessing of God, without which no Nation shall flourish, will be most effectually drawn down by general reformation.

I shall conclude with a few general remarks, tending to promote the purpose of my introductory Discourse.

It must be confessed, that in the last century, there was some reason for complaining of the length and dullness of Sermons. Controversial divinity, which was then in fashion, as it was then frequently conducted, was dismally dull. Divisions and subdivisions were made without end and without reason. The Preacher often claimed the attention of the hearer, to a most uninteresting composition, for the space of two hours. It was this practice which induced a very serious and sensible Writer, to compose a consolatory Essay for the evil of long Sermons †. It was an evil, and probably contributed to give men that disgust for sermons, which is hardly yet removed.

• Jer. xxii. 29.

† Boyle.

But there subsists no longer the shadow of a reason for complaint against the length of Sermons, as they are now usually produced. The tedious mode of infinite divisions and sub-divisions is justly fallen into disuse. The bald and miserable language which disgraced the pulpit, when undisciplined Fanatics ascended it, is now despised and avoided. The taste of the Preacher is improved, and so is the taste of the Congregation. Indeed the Preacher through indolence or complaisance to a fastidious audience, too often errs in the extreme of a blameable brevity. But he usually makes some compensation by the elegance of his language and the propriety of his elocution. Short as discourses now are, and embellished with ornaments calculated to please the ear and the imagination, the hearer can no longer plead an excuse for his inattention, the want of attraction in the mode of address; but should the Preacher be deficient in enticing words, yet as he is for the most part brief, we may surely attend a little while. We are not required, like our Lord's disciples, to watch even so long as one hour. And though the Preacher should be unskilful or deficient in oratory, we may still be edified; if we are not wanting to ourselves; if we are not wanting in faith and humility. In all such cases we should remember that the treasures of religion are said in Scripture, to be frequently preserved in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. By the *foolishness of preaching*, supposing that expression to mean real weakness, we may be made wise unto salvation. Very inadequate things and persons, according to our conception, become, by the co-operation of God, the most effectual means of grace.

As salvation of souls is the most valuable object of the true Christian, and as it is incontestibly true that Sermons duly preached and duly attended to, greatly conduce to promote the improvement of heart necessary to obtain it, let us close the subject with a devout wish, that neither we who preach nor ye who hear may be deficient in attention to our bounden duty and service. *O Earth, Earth, Earth, hear the word of the Lord**! and may the Lord pour into the hearts of the Preachers of his Word, such abundance of his grace, that they may save their own souls and those committed to their care.

* Jer. xxii. 29.

PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION

The first of the two main parts of the paper is devoted to a discussion of the general principles of the theory of the structure of the atom. The second part is devoted to a discussion of the specific details of the theory of the structure of the atom. The first part is devoted to a discussion of the general principles of the theory of the structure of the atom. The second part is devoted to a discussion of the specific details of the theory of the structure of the atom.

C O N T E N T S.

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TERBURY, D. D. Lord Bishop of
Rochester, and Dean of Westmin-
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F R O M

The SERMONS of FRANCIS ATTERBURY, D. D.
Lord Bishop of ROCHESTER, and Dean of WESTMINSTER.

S E R M O N I.

On the Incarnation of our Lord.

MATTH. xi. 6.

Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.

AN D can any man then be offended in thee, blessed Jesu! who hast undertaken, and done, and suffered so much for all men! who willingly emptiedst thyself of all thy glory, lesteft heaven and the bosom of thy father, for our sakes; and, when thou tookest upon thee to deliver man, didst not (as at this time) abhor the virgin's womb! Can a design of so much goodness ever miscarry by the folly of those, on whose very account it was undertaken! Can such a message of love (of a love astonishing and infinite) be rejected!—Canst thou thyself, the great messenger, be received any otherwise, than with the open arms and hearts of all thy creatures, for whose redemption thou wert thus made flesh, and dweltst among us!—Is it possible for any one of them to be anyways offended in thee!

Yet so it is, blessed Lord! that from thy first coming in the flesh to this time, there have been unreasonable men all along, that have taken offence at thee!—And there will not fail to be such within the pale of christianity itself, even till thy second coming to judge the world!—Thy doctrines have been complained of, as laying too great a restraint on human nature, as hard and unpracticable sayings!—Thy mysteries have been doubted of, disputed against, and ridiculed, by men of perverse and proud minds, who are resolved to believe nothing, farther than they can thoroughly and clearly comprehend it!—Thy person itself, the circumstances and way of thy coming, have been an offence unto many!—*To the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness!* 1 Cor. i. 23. A constant occasion of falling, to all godless and sinful men, whose high minds are not brought into captivity to the obedience of faith, nor made fit for the reception of the truth, as it is in Jesus!—But blessed are all they (have thy holy lips pronounced) who in none of these ways are offended in thee!

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As to the two former ways of being offended in Christ, on the account of the difficulty of practising those duties he has enjoined, and believing those articles of faith he hath proposed, I shall not at present enter into the consideration of them. The festival we are now celebrating, determines me rather to point my reflections on the offence which has been taken at the person of Christ, the method and manner of his coming amongst us!—The objections of which kind, I shall briefly propose, and answer; that so having rooted and grounded ourselves in a firm belief of the doctrine, we may, with the more assurance, make those several improvements of it, which will be profitable unto godliness.

It hath formerly by Porphyry and Celsus, and ever since by their successors, the open or hidden enemies of Christianity, been thus argued :

That the doctrine of the incarnation of the Son of God is unreasonable and incredible; inconsistent with the clear notions we have of the unlimited perfections of God, and the finite properties of man; between which there is so wide and eternal a difference, as seems to render them incapable of being joined together in one and the same person or subject. For how can wisdom, perfection, and happiness itself, be mixed with folly, infirmity, and misery? What union can there be between what is finite, and that which is infinite?

But were it conceivable, how the divine and human nature could be united into one person; yet is it not (say they) reasonable to believe, that such a method was actually taken. For surely there were other ways beside this, of restoring lapsed man to the favour of God, and that happiness which he had forfeited, and of taking away the sins of the world: the unlimited mercy of the divine nature was of itself sufficient to compass this end, and forgive this debt, without requiring any ransom; and unless a God incarnate were absolutely and indispensably requisite to free mankind from the guilt and dominion of their sins, it is no ways reasonable to think, that recourse was had to so extraordinary a remedy.

Now, as to the first part of the objection, the impossibility of an union between God and man in the same person or subject, it is a bold and a presumptu-

ous plea. For who is he, among the reasoners of this world, that is able precisely to determine, in such obscure points as these, what is possible or impossible to be accomplished by almighty wisdom and power? Are our notions of these two beings, God and man, so full every way, and distinct and clear, as to satisfy us, that such an union is in itself repugnant, and altogether impossible? Would we impartially consider what passes within our minds, when we employ them in such nice disquisitions as these, we should find, that all that passes there is darkness and confusion; and that we can discern too little of either of these natures, to be able to pronounce, with any assurance, that it is impossible for them to be joined together in one person.

We have no just idea indeed of the manner in which such an union may be effected; but so neither have we of the manner of that union which is between our souls and bodies. An union, which we can as little explain, or comprehend, as even that of the deity with the humanity; and which yet we can no more doubt of, than we can of our own being and subsistence. Will the most keen and piercing wit among the sons of men say, that he perceives plainly, how a corporeal can be joined to an incorporeal being; and what are those common ties and ligaments that hold them; how they act upon each other; move, and are moved by turns; and what kind of contract that is, by which such motions are mutually communicated? No, these are secrets, which we can no ways, by any strength of thought, fathom; and which perhaps we should have been apt to imagine inconsistent and impossible speculations, had not experience taught us, that things are really so, though we cannot possibly find out how they should be so.

Had the spirits of men been once unbodied, and had God revealed to them in that state of separation, that he designed them for another station in a lower world; and, in order to it, would clothe them with gross and sensible matter, and make them act continually in concert with fleshly organs, and with dependence upon them, no doubt but one of these forward reasoners would have concluded immediately, that the thing proposed was unphilosophical and absurd.—And therefore,

fore, that, either the revelation did not really come from God, or that this could not be the sense of it.—For how could body and spirit, things so totally different, anyways meet together, and compose one entire subject? or how could they, when thus met, have any possible influence on each other?

These therefore are immodest and unjustifiable ways of reasoning, which would persuade us to reject truths, on the account of some supposed impossibilities, of which it is manifestly impossible that we should have any clear and adequate conception. And therefore, in all such cases, it becomes not us to say, what can, or cannot be done, or what the nature of things will, or will not admit of. The short and only sure point, upon which controversies of this kind must turn, is, to see what God in his holy Word has assured us concerning them.

As to the second part of the objection, That there were other ways of bringing about the pardon of sin, and the salvation of man; far be it from us to prescribe to God, or to say—That infinite goodness and wisdom itself could have found out no other expedient. But since this, and no other, was made use of by God, we must needs think it the most proper of any, and the best proportioned to those ends and purposes for which he designed it. And though it becomes us rather implicitly to adore the divine wisdom, than curiously to enquire into the reasons, and boldly to sound the depths of it; yet is there some light afforded us in scripture, whereby we may discover a mighty fitness and congruity between the method that was used, and the end that was brought about by it.

Guiding ourselves therefore by the discoveries made to us on this head in holy writ, we may safely venture to say,—It was fit and requisite, that our Redeemer should be God, that, by the infinite dignity of his person, the value of the sacrifice which he made of himself in the flesh, might be so far enhanced, as to become a sufficient atonement for the sins of the whole world: That the laws which he should publish might carry in them the utmost obligation and force: That his doctrine might have the highest authority: That we, being assured of his absolute security from sin, might look up to his example, as to a perfect pattern of

holiness; and in all things, without doubt or fear, implicitly follow his steps.

It was fit he should be God, that he might give an instance of infinite condescension and love toward us, and might from thence engage us to love and obey him also, without bounds: That he might be enabled in our behalf to vanquish Satan, and all the powers of Hell, and erect a spiritual kingdom in the hearts of men, by triumphing first over all the strength, and cunning, and malice of our spiritual enemies.

It was highly expedient also, that he should be man, that our offences might be repaired in that nature which committed them: And *as, by one man's disobedience, many were made sinners; so, by the obedience of one man, many might be made righteous.* Rom. v. 19.

That he might be qualified from thence to be a *merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God* (Heb. ii. 17.), and a proper intercessor with him for man, whose infirmities he had tried, whose needs he had been sensible of: and having *himself suffered and been tempted, might be able and willing to succour those that are tempted.* Ver. 18.

Lastly, That by appearing in human form, he might make a difference between the rigorous and astonishing dispensation of the law, and that milder one of grace: Coming to us in the most familiar and winning way: Instructing us in our duty like one of us; and proposing to us a lively and full example of what he taught, in what he did and suffered for us.

These are some of the accounts which God has hinted to us in scripture, why his infinite wisdom was pleased to pitch upon this way, rather than any other, of reconciling man to himself. And yet, after all the accounts we can give ourselves of it, we cannot but confess it to be an abyss of mercy, which neither we nor angels are able to pry into; and which God alone, who contrived it, can fully explain and comprehend.

Let us forbear therefore to wade farther into the depth of this great mystery of God manifest in the flesh; and let us satisfy ourselves with believing it, as God has revealed it, without indulging our curiosity in an unprofitable search after the reasons which induced God to order the stupendous work of our redemption

in so inconceivable a manner : And let us proceed to draw from thence those plain practical improvements, which may render it profitable unto godliness, and with which it will readily furnish us.

And the first and most natural use we are to make of it is, to raise to ourselves from thence matter of thankfulness and spiritual joy. *Behold, I bring you*, said the angel to the shepherds, *good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people : For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.* Luke, ii. 10, 11. And these indeed are the best tidings that ever God sent, or the world received : tidings of no less than freedom from the guilt and punishment of sin ; of a way opened to repentance, and the favour of God ; to peace of conscience in this world, and everlasting happiness in the next.

Before the coming of Christ, all the account we could have of these things from the light of nature, went no farther than this.—That the breach of any of God's laws brought guilt along with it ; and that guilt made us liable to punishment.—Whether God, upon any considerations, would ever remit this punishment, was more than mere reason could possibly tell us. For the justice of God certainly required, that sin should be followed with punishment : Nor was this inconsistent with the goodness of God, which was otherwise sufficiently manifested to us. Under these kind of dark and uncomfortable reasonings were we left, till Christ *the sun of righteousness arose with healing in his wings* (Mal. iv. 2.), and published the gospel of repentance, and remission of sins. All thanks and praise therefore be given to him, that our tongues can possibly express, or our hearts conceive ! Abraham, at a mighty distance, and upon a very dim and imperfect view of it, *rejoiced to see this day* (John, viii. 56.) : The angels, who themselves had no interest in this deliverance, yet were highly pleased with the prospect of those blessings it derived on their fellow-creature man ; and therefore sung that hymn on this occasion, which the evangelist has recorded.—*Glory be to God on high, on earth peace, good-will towards men.* Luke, ii. 14. And shall not we, for whose sake this peace was sent on earth, and to whom all this good-will was meant, shall not we also give glory to God on high, and

rejoice before him with reverence ? Surely this is news, at which (as Isaiah prophesies of the miraculous effects that should take place in the kingdom of the Messiah) *the lame man should leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb should sing.* Isa. xxxv. 6.

A second improvement that should be made of this doctrine is, to raise our love to God from hence, to all the degrees of which it is capable.

For love surely deserves returns of love ; and the highest instances of love, the highest returns of it. Now *in this was manifested the love of God toward us ; because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.* Herein is love (as St. John continues his argument), *not that we loved God* (that is, loved God first, and by that means drew down his love upon us), *but that he loved us* (antecedently, freely), *and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.* (1 John, iv. 9, 10.)

Had God sent the meanest attendant in the court of Heaven, to publish abroad the good tidings of his free and voluntary pardon of sin, should we not have entertained it as a message of unspeakable love ! How much more, when he sends his Son, his only begotten Son, on this errand ! When he sends him to partake of our nature, and of all the infirmities, miseries, shame and pain that attend it ; and at last to be made a sacrifice for our sins, by the very hands of those men for whose sake he left heaven ! This raises the motive so high, that our lips are faint when we speak of it ; and our heart melts away almost under the sense of that excessive burthen of love which lies upon us.

But how strangely is the force of this motive weakened by those who make Christ a mere man, not the eternal Son of God, sent out to us from the bosom of his father ! For at this rate the love of God toward us abates very much ; and then, I am afraid, ours toward him will proportionably abate with it. For the higher apprehensions we have of God's antecedent love to man, the stronger will our endeavours still be to raise our affections up to a pitch some way suitable to those apprehensions.

So that, whether these men have, by this expedient, lessened the difficulties of their faith, or not (which is matter of dispute), sure we are, that they have
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evidently lessened the argument for their love by it.

Another plain use we are to make of this doctrine is, to give us an high sense of the dignity of our nature, and an hearty displeasure at those sins which debase and dishonour it.

Behold now, as the Apostle to the Hebrews argues, is that prophecy of the Psalmist concerning man fulfilled in your ears.—*Thou hast crowned him with glory and honour, and hast set him over the works of thine hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet* (Heb. ii. 7.); that is, The human nature, by its assumption to the divine, is now advanced far above principalities and powers, and every created being: Nay, it is, in the person of Christ, become an object of adoration, even to spirits of the first rank and order. For, as the same apostle interprets another passage of the Psalmist, *When God brought his first begotten Son into the world, he saith, Let all the angels of God worship him.* Heb. i. 6.

Should not such a reflection as this, make us resolve to do nothing beneath that nature, which God has so highly honoured? Not to pollute it with vile affections and lusts; Not to set it upon mean and unworthy pursuits, and on minding earthly things; but to have our conversation in Heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body. Phil. iii. 19, 20, 21.

A sense of birth and noble blood will often keep men from doing things beneath themselves, when no other motive can restrain them: And shall it not be sufficient to preserve us from every evil and defiling work, to consider our near alliance with God himself, by the intervention of the Man Christ Jesus? Surely such a consideration should engage us, after the most powerful manner, to purify our natures, even as his is pure; and to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit. 2 Cor. vii. 1.

And as God's assuming our nature should make us reflect often on the dignity and worth of it, and resolve not to defile that with base and brutish enjoyments, which Christ hath thus ennobled and sanctified; so on the other hand,

The condescension also of the Son of

God, in this mysterious work of our redemption, should infuse into us a spirit of universal humility. Since He *who was the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person* (Heb. i. 3.), emptied himself willingly of all that glory, to become a vile and miserable creature for the salvation of men, what a deep lowliness of mind ought we (in imitation of him) to carry about us, through the several stages of life, and the different administrations of Providence? How willing should it make us to undertake any work, to be seen in any office, though never so mean and low, that tends any way to the good and welfare of mankind? It is the great Apostle's argument, *Let nothing be done* (says he) *through strife, or vain-glory; but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves.* Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Phil. ii. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

A fifth thing I would recommend to you, from considering the incarnation of Christ, is, that we would take care to trace all the steps of that example which he set us in the flesh; and which that he might set us, was one great end of his taking our nature upon him. And, oh, let not this end be frustrated, by our neglecting to look up to that admirable pattern of all virtue and holiness in the life of the immaculate Jesus, which the four gospels have afforded us! A life, as useful to be handed down to us in all its circumstances, as his very precepts themselves. For in that he exemplified his precepts, and gave an instance of the practicableness, the beauty, and the power of them. Such an instance, as charms the eyes, and engages the hearts of all that behold it; and will, if well attended to, have the same influence upon us, that the enjoying the immediate view of God, face to face, once had upon Moses: it will make us shine with part of that lustre we are looking upon, and transform us into some kind of resemblance with it. *We all with open face beholding, as in a*

glafs, the glory of the Lord (2 Cor. iii. 18.), that is, viewing carefully the image of our Lord's life, as it is drawn to us in the glafs of the evangelists, and studying to exprefs it in ourselves, *we shall be changed* (as it follows) *into the same image from glory to glory; from one degree of virtue and perfection to another, till at last we arrive at the very measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.* Ephes. iv. 13.

I shall mention but one improvement more of the doctrine of the day, and then conclude.—And that is, that we should take occasion from hence, highly to esteem and reverence the evangelical dispensation: To value and prize that everlasting gospel, which Christ sealed to us with his blood, above all other books, religions and philosophies; above all other methods of living and dying that have been ever taught or practised in the world.

Were there nothing contained in it, but that one *faithful saying, worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners* (1 Tim. i. 15.); even that should recommend it more to us, and make us take greater delight in perusing it, than turning over all the volumes of wit and reason, all the discourses of moral virtue, all the treatises of arts and sciences, which the learned part of mankind among the Gentiles have afforded us: We should count them all but dross and dung, in comparison of the *excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.* Phil. iii. 8.

But the best expression of our reverence towards this gospel is, to comply with the terms of it. Let us remember, that the last scope of the whole mystery of godliness is, to oblige mankind to be good and virtuous; and to lead lives answerable to such bright discoveries and motives as revelation has proposed to us. And therefore let me exhort and beseech every one of you this day, as ye would not (as far as in you lies) frustrate the design of our Saviour's birth; as ye would not baffle the truth of those prophecies concerning the innocence and purity of the lives of men under the reign of the Messiah; and, as ye would not hereafter wish, that your Saviour had never been born, nor you yourselves neither; to be careful for your parts to answer the great end of his incarnation,

and to live as becomes a people, that have been thus redeemed of the Lord.

For how shall ye escape, if ye neglect so great salvation?

SERMON II.

The difficult Passages of Scripture vindicated from such Objections as are usually made to them; and proper Directions given, how we are to use them.

2 PET. iii. 16.

In which are some things hard to be understood: Which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

ST. PETER, in this chapter, employs his pen in fortifying the minds of those Christians, to whom he writes, against that scorn and mockery they met with from some profane men, who disputed the certainty of this world's dissolution, and of Christ's coming to judgment; and derided the eager expectations of the first believers concerning it. *Where,* said they, *is the promise of his coming? for, since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue, as they were, from the beginning of the creation.* Ver. 4. Against the attempts of these scoffers, the Apostle arms them, throughout this whole chapter; assures them of the reality of their hopes, and of the truth of the divine promises; and exhorts them to wait, with patience and humility, for their accomplishment. *The Lord, saith he, is not slack concerning his promise (as some men count slackness), but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* Ver. 9.

Where he intimates the true reason of Christ's delaying his coming to be, that he may give room and space to all men every where to repent, and embrace his gospel. *Wherefore, beloved, says he (a little afterwards), account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation. Even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you: As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest,*

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as they do also the other scriptures, to their own destruction. Ver. 14, &c.

He seems purposely to have made mention of St. Paul in this place, not only because he concurred with him in his testimony concerning the end and design of God's long-sufferance, but because his writings also had been objected against, by those very scoffers, as obscure and unintelligible. And therefore he took an occasion of mentioning one passage out of them, that he might have an opportunity of vindicating the whole from these men's scornful exceptions. *Account, says he, that the long-suffering of the Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you. The place of St. Paul referred to, seems to be that in the epistle to the Romans (chap. ii. 4.), Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?* From which parallel text thus produced from St. Paul, he takes occasion to speak of all his writings, and of the imputation which in general lay upon them. *As also in all his epistles* (continues he), *speaking in them of these things; in which* (i. e.) in which epistles [I explain it so, notwithstanding a criticism taken from the Greek, which would make the words *in which* belong to the things spoken of in the epistles, and not to the epistles themselves, which criticism I shall not now trouble you with], I say therefore *in which epistles, are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable* (that are unlearned, i. e. unskilled and unversed in divine things, and unstable, i. e. of light, desultory, unbalanced minds) *wrest, as they do the other scriptures, to their own destruction.*

Having thus cleared the connexion of the text, I shall discourse on it after the following manner:

- I. By enlarging a little on the proposition itself, which it contains. That there are in St. Paul's writings, and in the other scriptures also, things hard to be understood.
- II. By giving some account how, and for what reason it has come to pass, that the scriptures are, and must be, in some measure obscure: How necessary and unavoidable it was, that there

should be some passages in them dark and difficult, even to those who lived at the time when they were written, and yet more so to us, who live at this distance from the age of the apostles.

III. By shewing you that this carries no reflection at all in it upon the divine goodness or wisdom. And then in the

IV. And last place, by raising some observations from what has been said, and preventing the ill uses that may be made of it.

I. This proposition is evidently laid down in the text. That there are in St. Paul's writings, things hard to be understood: And it is plainly intimated, that there are such things in the other parts of holy writ also; inasmuch as they who wrest these difficult passages of St. Paul, are said to wrest the other scriptures also.

It is indeed an undoubted truth, and what no good Christian is, I think, in the least concerned to deny, that the books, both of the Old and New Testament, are not every where equally clear and intelligible. They have, like other books, a mixture of that which is easy, with that which is hard to be understood; a great deal that is plain and obvious, and somewhat also that is obscure and difficult. Notwithstanding they were designed to contain a revelation of God's will to men, yet was not that revelation designed to partake every where alike of the nature of its great Author and Revealer, who is (in the phrase of St. John) *Light, and in whom there is no darkness at all.* 1 John, i. 5.

Sometimes the things spoken of are so mysterious and sublime, that our limited and weak apprehensions can hardly reach them. Sometimes the manner of speaking, even concerning common things, is dark and dubious. The Apocalypse is received into the canon, together with the other parts of scripture; the sense of it has been much sought and searched after, by pious and inquisitive men, in all ages of the church: And yet we have reason to believe, that it has never yet been thoroughly understood by any man.

The beginning of St. John's gospel is so far intelligible, as that it plainly enough establishes the divinity of our Lord,

and his co-eternity with God the Father : but yet nobody, I think, will say, that the sense of every term in that chapter is so clear and easy, as that no Christian, of whatever rank or degree, can, upon perusing, and attentively considering the whole, miss the meaning of it.

Even the discourses of our blessed Lord are somewhat dark and intricate in some parts of them. That with Nicodemus about regeneration (John, iii.), and that with the men of Capernaum, about eating his body and blood (John, vi.), have in them what will command and exercise our utmost attention. And his account of the destruction of Jerusalem, in St. Matthew (Matth. xxiv.), is so interwoven with that of the day of judgment, that it is very difficult to distinguish exactly, what expressions belong to the one, and what to the other.

And then, as to St. Paul in particular, his doctrines of justification by faith, and not by works ; of election and reprobation (Gal. ii. 16.) ; his description of the struggle between sin and the law, in the natural man, as yet unassisted by grace ; and his account of the spiritual body with which we are to rise at the last day (Rom. vii. 1 Cor. xv.), are sufficient instances of the truth of St. Peter's assertion, that in him particularly are some things hard to be understood.

This truth therefore being supposed, I proceed now, in the

II^d place, to give some account, how these obscure passages came to have a place in scripture : how it could not otherwise be, but that the holy writings should, in some parts of them, be dark and difficult, even to those who lived at the time when they were written, and yet more so to us, who live at this distance from the age of the apostles.

And the plain account of this matter is, that, though the scripture was written by men, under the immediate inspiration and guidance of the Holy Ghost, yet were those men, at the time of this inspiration, left to the free use of their own natural faculties and powers ; and to express themselves every one after their particular fashion and manner. The Holy Ghost, though it presided over the minds and pens of the apostles, so far as to preserve them from error, yet doth not seem to have dictated to them what they were to say, word by word, but in that to have left them, in good measure, if not alto-

gether, to themselves. Which appears plainly from hence, in that we find the several writers of the New Testament always in their several proper and peculiar characters ; and as different in their styles almost, as one human author is from another.

For what is left to men to express, placed only under an over-ruling power, which necessitates them to speak nothing but truth, must needs be expressed, though always truly, yet after the unequal, imperfect manner of men, sometimes more darkly, and sometimes more clearly. I say therefore, that the apostles and evangelists, making use of their natural faculties and ways of speech, in committing to writing the truths delivered to them, it could not be expected, that they should speak always with the same degree of perspicuity, because no other writer does so.

Further, the nature of some things they delivered was such, so high and heavenly, so obscure and altogether unknown to men, that the language of men could not but fail under them. When they were to express them, they were of necessity sometimes to fall short, in what they said, of what they imagined and conceived ; and, for want of fit and adequate terms, to clothe their thoughts in unequal and improper ones. Particularly as to St. Paul, who had been in the third heaven, and there heard things unutterable ; was it to be expected, that, when he came down from thence, he should have spoke of those mysteries after a clear and satisfactory manner ? No, those, to whom he spake, must have been in the third heaven too, thoroughly to have understood his meaning.

It is no wonder therefore, that there should be passages in scripture of a doubtful and uncertain meaning, even to those who lived at the time when that scripture was penned. It is yet less a wonder, that there should be many more such, with regard to us, who live at this distance from the age of the apostles.

For consider we with ourselves, what manner of men the apostles were in their birth and education ; what country they lived in ; what language they wrote in ; and we shall find it rather wonderful, that there are so few, than that there are so many things, that we are at a loss to understand. They were men all (except St. Paul)

Paul) meanly born and bred, and uninstructed utterly in the arts of speaking and writing. All the language they were masters of, was purely what was necessary to express themselves upon the common affairs of life, and in matters of intercourse with men of their own rank and profession. When they came therefore to talk of the great doctrines of the cross, to preach up the astonishing truths of the gospel, they brought to be sure their old idiotisms and plainness of speech along with them. And is it strange then, that the deep things of God should not always be expressed by them in words of the greatest propriety and clearness?

The Eastern manner of thinking and speaking, at that time especially when the scripture was written was widely different from ours, who live in this age, and this quarter of the world. The language of the East speaks of nothing simply, but in the boldest and most lofty figures, and in the longest and most strained allegories. Its transitions, from one thing to another, are irregular and sudden, without the least notice given. Its manner of expressing things is wonderfully short and comprehensive, so as to leave much more to be understood, than is plainly and directly spoken. And this also cannot but contribute to make the holy writings seem, in some parts of them, obscure, to such as are used to throw their thoughts, and their words, into a quite different mould.

Beyond all this, we, at this distance, cannot be exactly acquainted with the occasions upon which some parts of scripture were written; which nevertheless are the true and proper keys that open the meaning of them. We see not the frequent allusions to customs then known and in use. We are in the dark to many of the objections made to the apostles doctrine, which are tacitly obviated and answered by them in their epistles, without being mentioned. Under these, and many other disadvantages, the holy scriptures must needs lie, with regard to the obviousness of their sense and meaning, to us, at this distance: and it can be no blemish to them therefore, if that meaning be not always obvious.

I might, with truth, add one thing more upon this head, that, where the interpretation of scripture has any difficulty, that difficulty is often, in good measure,

owing to the preposterous endeavours used, by some men, to explain and clear it. The multiplicity of comments written upon scripture, and the variety of all the possible senses of any text, started by those writers, have been so far from reaching the end aimed at, the dissipating all doubts and difficulties, that they have cast a mist over many places, which of themselves were plain and clear; and have rendered some, that were really a little obscure, yet more unintelligible.

Numberless volumes have been written on scripture, in every age almost since it was published; and still the later writers have generally striven to distinguish themselves from the elder, by some new guesses, by saying somewhat that hath not been said before. And thus the mind of an honest enquirer is perplexed and confounded, and, in the midst of a thousand false meanings, easily loses sight of the true one.

But still it will be said, that these are only rational accounts, how scripture comes in some places to be obscure, not at all justifications of its being so. God, who inspired the apostles to write the holy scripture, might, if he had pleased, have suggested to them the very words also in which it was to be written; and, by that means, have made it all clear and easy, and took away all occasion of doubts and disputes concerning it. And since he could have done so, why was it not done, if so be the scripture were designed for a rule of faith and manners? For can a rule be too certain? Can a man know too plainly what he is to do, and what he is to believe?

In answer to this therefore, I shall shew, as I proposed, in the

III^d place, That it carries no reflection upon the divine goodness or wisdom, that the scripture is not in every part as plain and clear, as it was possible to have been made.

For (1st) the goodness of God is by no means obliged to do every thing for us that is possible to be done, but only that which is fitting and sufficient, in order to the end it designs. Now the end proposed by God, in causing the scripture to be written, is, to afford us a complete rule and measure of whatever is to be believed or done by us. If therefore, in all points of faith and practice, scripture

is sufficiently plain and clear, it is as plain and clear as it need to be; and it can be no reflection on the divine goodness, not to have made it plainer.

But now, that whatever is requisite to be believed or done by us, is sufficiently evident in scripture, will appear from these two considerations:

1. The darkness of scripture in some particular places does not hinder its being generally plain and clear. Its having some things in it hard to be understood, implies, that it has but some, and that most things in it are easy to be understood, and lie open and level to the meanest understandings. The truth is, whatever difficulties there are in scripture, they are few and little in comparison of what is plain and intelligible there. Take it altogether, and it well deserves the character holy David bestows on it; that it is a *lantern unto his feet, and a light unto his paths*, Psalm cxix. 105.; that *the testimony of the Lord is sure, and giveth wisdom unto the simple*, ver. 130.; that *the commandment of the Lord is pure, and giveth light unto the eyes*, Psalm xix. 8. And if in general, and for the most part, scripture be perspicuous and clear, we have reason to think there is enough of it clear to instruct us in the whole of our duty; and make us sufficiently wise unto salvation; especially since, in the

2d place, Nothing there that is *hard to be understood*, is necessary to be understood by us; and therefore, whatever truth is contained in any obscure place of scripture, we may satisfy ourselves, that the knowledge or practice of it shall never be required at our hands upon the account of its being contained there.

I say, upon the account of its being contained there; for a necessary doctrine that is delivered obscurely in one place, may yet be revealed clearly in another; and wherever it is clearly revealed we are obliged to take notice of it. But whatever doctrine is contained in one or more obscure texts of scripture, and no where else clearly expressed, is not necessary to be embraced and believed by us; nor shall we be condemned for not receiving it.

The goodness of God is sufficiently justified, in proposing the scripture as a rule of faith to us; for though it be not equally perspicuous and clear throughout, yet is it in the main, and for the most part

so; and wherever it is hard to be understood, it is on that very account not necessary to be understood. But,

Secondly, Neither is there any reflection by this means cast on the wisdom of God. For though it may be said, if these hard places are not capable of being understood, why were they written? Why were they made parts of the revelation of God's will to men, if we are still as much in the dark to them as if they had been never revealed? Yet to this it may, in the

1. First place, be answered, that there is no part of scripture so obscure as to be utterly unintelligible. St. Peter says only, there are *some things hard*, but he says not, that there are any impossible to be understood. It is difficult indeed in some places to reach the sense of the inspired writers: but still it is not so difficult but that it may be done, if with care and attention we study the holy scripture; if we free ourselves from prepossessions and prejudices; if we take in all proper helps, and make use of all proper means; and, above all, if we ardently beg of God the assistance of his good Spirit, to teach and enlighten us, and lead us into all truth. I say, there is no difficulty so great in scripture but that, by the supernatural illuminations of God's Spirit, concurring with our natural endeavours, it is possible to be mastered; and therefore God did not inspire the holy writers to write any thing altogether in vain and to no purpose; for nothing written by them is perfectly incapable of being understood; only some things lie readier to our sight, upon the surface as it were of the text, and others lie deeper, and we are forced therefore, in the words of Solomon, *to dig for them as for hid treasures*, Prov. ii. 4. But,

Secondly, The wisdom of God is further justified in leaving these hard passages, inasmuch as there are several wise ends which it serves by it, and several weighty reasons which it has for so doing.

He left them on purpose to humble the presumption and pride of man, to confound *the wisdom of the wise* of this world, 1 Cor. i. 19. and to give us an instance of the mighty power of God, in making those plain men, the apostles, utter such great and sublime truths, as those of the most improved understandings among the heathens,

heathens, by the mere light of nature, never did nor could do.

He left them on purpose to create an awful reverence of mind in us towards holy truths; which, had they been all easy of access, would, in a little time, have grown familiar, and cheap to us also.

To secure the majesty of religion therefore, he wrapped up some of the great mysteries of it in obscurity; *He made (as the Psalmist speaks) darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him with dark water, and thick clouds to cover him, Psalm xviii. 11.*

Further, He left them also to exercise our industry and to engage our attention. He designed the holy book to be such as that we might make it always our companion and our study; that our *delight* might continually be (as David's was) *in the law of the Lord, and in that we might meditate day and night, Psalm i. 2.* In order to which it was requisite that the sense of every thing, every where, should not be too plain and obvious; for how then could we have found always fresh matter for our thoughts and enquiries? No, the treasure of divine knowledge was necessarily so to be hid, in these sacred volumes, as not soon to be exhausted, so as continually to provoke our searches, and to feed our mind with ever fresh discoveries; so as that, how long soever we meditate upon it, we may have still room left for further meditations. Were all plain, were all open there, the mind would quickly droop, and the attention languish, upon the repeated views of that which it was so well acquainted with, and knew so thoroughly.

Again, God mixed together obscure with plain things, deep with common truths in scripture, that what was addressed to all might be adapted to every one's capacity. The babes in Christ, as well as grown saints, the weak promiscuously, and the strong, were to read the holy scriptures; and therefore fit it was that there should be food in it proportioned to both, milk for the one, and strong meat for the other.

Yet further; These dark doctrines and puzzling passages were inserted to be the test of ingenuous, of sincere, and well-disposed minds; to see whether, when we were once satisfied that a book came from God, we would acquiesce in every thing

contained in it, and submit ourselves (without disputes or cavils) as well to those parts of it which shocked, as to those which enlightened our minds: or whether we would not, as many have done, lay hold of every obscure passage to the prejudice of scripture, though we had otherwise never so many arguments for the divine original of it, and reject the authority of all that which is plain and clear there, for the sake of something which we do not comprehend.

Finally, God left these obscurities in holy writ, on purpose to give us a taste and glimpse, as it were, of those great and glorious truths, which shall hereafter fully be discovered to us in another world, but which *now are*, in some measure, *hidden from our eyes*, on purpose to make us earnestly aspire after, and long for, that blessed state and time, when all doubts shall be cleared, and the veil taken off from all mysteries: when *the book that is now in some measure shut, shall be opened, and every one of the seven seals thereof loosed, Rev. v. 5. When that which is perfect shall come, and that which is in part shall be done away, 1 Cor. xiii. 10.* When we shall exchange faith for sight, hope for enjoyment, reasoning for intuition; and shall not, as we do now, *see through a glass darkly, but know, even as we are known, ver. 12.*

To that blessed state God of his infinite mercy bring us all, &c.

S E R M O N III.

The same Subject continued.

2 PET. iii. 16.

In which are some things hard to be understood. Which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

IN my former discourse I shewed you that these words of St. Peter relate directly to the writings of St. Paul, in which he owns, *there are some things hard to be understood, and that they who were unlearned and unstable, wrested them as they did the other scriptures, to their own destruction.* Whereby he intimates, that there are also in the other parts of scripture, as well as in the writings of St. Paul, obscure passages, liable to be misunderstood,

understood, wrested, and perverted by unlearned and unstable readers.

I have therefore taken an occasion from hence to discourse to you at large concerning the difficult parts of holy writ, so as to take in the general argument; and yet to keep my eye more particularly all along upon the books of the New Testament, to which St. Peter's words chiefly refer.

I proposed to treat of this subject under the four following heads:

- I. By enlarging a little on the proposition allowed and laid down in the text, That there are in St. Paul's writings, and in the other scriptures also, *things hard to be understood*.
- II. By giving some account how, and for what reason, it hath come to pass, that the scriptures are and must be in some measure obscure: how necessary and unavoidable it was, that there should be some passages in them dark and difficult, even to those who lived at the time when they were written, and yet more so to us, who live at this distance from the age of the apostles.
- III. By shewing you, that this carries in it no reflection, either upon the goodness or wisdom of God: not on his goodness; because though he has left some things in holy writ *hard to be understood*, yet he hath left enough there easy and plain, enough to inform us clearly of the whole compass of what we are bound to believe and to practise: not on his wisdom; because these dark parts of holy writ have their uses, as well as the clear ones; there being many wise ends and weighty reasons for inserting them; several of which I reckoned up to you in my last discourse.
- IV. And lastly, I was to raise some observations from what hath been said: to prevent the wrong uses that might, and to point out the true and only use that ought, to be made of it.

The two first of these heads have been fully spoken to; the third has been entered upon, and in some measure cleared; and what remains behind of it will fall into the fourth and last general head, the enlarging on which shall be the business of this present discourse.

And the first thing I shall observe, from what has been said on this subject,

shall be, the folly and unreasonableness of those men who endeavour, from the obscurity of some parts of scripture, entirely to destroy the authority of it.

For thus they argue: The bible, say they, is a book ordered by God to be written for the information of mankind in what they are to believe and to do. And can we think, that such a book, from such an author, should have any defects in it? Can it be imagined, that God would speak to man, and yet not speak so as in every case to be understood by him? Is he either not able or not willing to express himself clearly? If neither of these can be supposed without blasphemy, how comes it to pass that this volume is so full of difficulties and mysteries? that this revelation of his will wants a yet further revelation, to give us a plain account of its meaning?

Thus do the *ungodly reason with themselves, but not aright* (Wisd. ii. 1.), as will appear from these following considerations.

It is a strange sort of argument, surely, that a book, which comes from God, must have nothing in it *obscure*, and *hard to be understood*. On the contrary, I think it were much to be suspected, that such a book as this was not of divine authority, if it should be found to lie ready and open to the most ordinary apprehensions in every part and passage of it. It is given to us, on purpose to open to us some discoveries concerning the divine nature, its essence and ineffable perfections; to inform us of mysterious truths, the secrets of heaven hid from natural reason, and from former ages. And can a book, do we think, that speaks of these deep things of God, with which the natural man is utterly unacquainted, speak so as not to give us the least trouble in understanding it? Can that, like which *our eyes never saw, nor our ears heard, nor hath it entered into the heart* (1 Cor. ii. 9.) to conceive any thing before, be told us in words as easy to be apprehended, as those by which we express the most common things that we every day converse with? It is not so, when we first set ourselves to learn any human art or science: the terms, the principles, the propositions of it, are all at first strange and uncouth, and make no bright impression upon the mind. They amaze, they puzzle, but they do not enlighten us; till by repeated views we have made them familiar

miliar and easy to us. And why then should we expect, that divine mysteries, and the things of another world, should more easily be taught and learnt, than human arts and sciences? The obscurity of the subject, whatever it be, must needs cause a proportionable obscurity in the expression of it; and no wonder then, if scripture be dark in some places, where it speaks of things so remote from human knowledge and apprehension.

Dark it must needs be, unless God, who miraculously enlightened the minds of the prophets and apostles, when they were to write it, should miraculously also open the understanding of every one that comes to read it. So that the difficulties occurring in some passages of a divine revelation, are so far from being an argument against its coming from God, that on the contrary, it were not reasonable to think it to be a divine revelation, if there were nothing abstruse and difficult in it.

Should it be further objected, that the design of scripture is, to reveal God's nature and will to mankind, to be a sure guide; and an easy rule of our belief and practice; and it ought therefore, in order to the attainment of this end, to be in every respect plain and clear: for to no purpose would it be given us by God, as a guide and a rule, if it be obscurely and doubtfully expressed.

To this the answer is ready: that the scripture, being intended by God as a rule of faith and manners, must needs be, and certainly is, so far clear, as to reach the end it is intended for; so far, as to enlighten our minds in all necessary saving truths, and to afford us, in plain intelligible terms, all that knowledge that is requisite to carry us to heaven. And thus far we affirm the scripture to be clear and easy. But it follows, that it ought, on this account, to be plain and clear, in every part and passage of it. If there be enough in it easy to be apprehended, it sufficiently answers the end for which it was designed, though there be some things in it which are not so. And therefore the objection fails in this, that it supposes scripture to be written perfectly for this end, and for no other, the affording us an easy familiar rule of faith and manners. This indeed was the chief, but it was not the only, end proposed in writing it.

Besides this, it was intended (as you have heard) so be written, as to humble the pride of men, and confound the wisdom of the wise: so as to try our probity, and to exercise our strictest attention, and to employ our industry, so as to create a reverence and awe in us of the Divine Revealer; and to give us an instance of the mighty power of God, in making those plain men, the apostles, utter such great and sublime truths, as those of the most improved understandings among the Heathen, by the mere light of nature, never did, or could do: in a word, so as to give us a light taste and glimpse only of those truths that were fully to be revealed to us in another world; and, by that means, to make us the more earnestly reach out our thoughts to, aspire after, and long for, the future and full enjoyment of them. And in order to attain these ends, it was fit and requisite that some parts of it should be involved in obscurity; as I discoursed to you the last opportunity. And therefore it must not be argued, that the written word of God, being designed for a rule of faith and action, must be perspicuous throughout; because there were other ends besides this, to which some parts of it were designed; and to the attaining which, the dark and difficult places in holy writ contribute as much, as the plain and most intelligible passages do, towards building us up in those doctrines that are necessary to salvation.

But then it is further objected, that this way of accounting for the obscurity of holy writ in some things, supposeth it to be evident in all things necessary to salvation; a supposition which will not easily be granted by those we have to deal with. For, say they, are not the doctrines of the divinity of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, and those of the same rank with these, necessary to salvation? And yet they are not plainly and clearly contained in scripture; for then reasonable men, upon reading scripture, could not have doubted, whether they were contained there, or not; much less in good earnest believed that they were not contained there.

Now the true account of this matter is this:

First, It is not pretended, that these doctrines are plainly contained in every text of scripture, which speaks of them; but

but only that, in some one text or more, they are proposed to us convincingly and clearly; and if a truth be once delivered so clearly as to leave no doubt, it is the same thing to us, who acknowledge the divine authority of all parts of scripture, as if it were many times there repeated. For example, were there no other text for the proof of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, in the sense in which the church of God hath always professed to believe it, but that only where our Saviour commands his disciples to *baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost* (Matth. xxviii. 19.); or that where St. John speaks of the *three witnesses in heaven* (1 John, v. 7.); either of these texts would be sufficient to make that doctrine an evident part of scripture, though in all the other passages usually produced for it, it should be allowed to be expressed obscurely.

Again, Neither is it pretended that these doctrines are any where, throughout the whole bible, expressed with the utmost degree of evidence and clearness, which words are anyways possibly capable of; but only that they are so expressed, that an honest impartial mind cannot well miss the sense of them. It might have been said indeed, in so many words, that Christ, and the Holy Spirit, were, from all eternity, distinct from the Father, and, together with him, one God blessed for ever; and equally the objects of our religious worship and service. But though this be not said there in so many terms, it is said however in such, as an unbiassed well-meaning man cannot mistake; and he that is not so, though it should have been said in these very terms, would perhaps have found a way to have mistaken, or rather wilfully to have perverted the sense of them.

The truth is, God never designed to give us an account of the mysteries of christianity, in expressions every way so bright and clear, as should prevent all possible wrestings and misconstructions. For this had been to do too great force to our assent, which ought to be free and voluntary. This had been to rob us of the rewards due to believing, and to take away the proper test and trial of sincere and ingenuous minds.

Besides, had all points of doctrine been delivered with such a degree of exactness,

been so minutely explained, so strictly and cautiously guarded on all sides, as to shut out the possibility of any mistaken meaning, the bible had been too voluminous and too subtle a book for common use. And though to some few distinguishing heads, it might have given better satisfaction, yet to the most, that is, to the unlettered part of mankind, it would have been ten times more obscure and unintelligible, than even now it is represented to be. So that upon the whole it was extremely fit and proper that these doctrines should be delivered with that degree of clearness as to be easily understood; not so as to be perfectly incapable of being misunderstood. It was requisite that they should be asserted shortly and plainly, not that they should be fenced about with all those nice distinctions which could anyway guard them from the attempts of the most captious and unreasonableness.

And with this degree of clearness we affirm that all necessary truths are delivered in scripture, *i. e.* with such a degree of clearness as is necessary. Nor does it weaken the strength of this assertion to say, that the sense of those passages in scripture, which we think plain to this purpose, is disputed by some, and absolutely denied by others; and therefore is not so plain as we imagine. For at this rate there would perhaps be never a plain text left in the whole book of God. Since what text almost is there, that has not been the subject of different interpretations and opinions?

There is scarce any thing so absurd, says an ancient, in nature or morality, but some philosopher or other has held it. And there is scarce any thing so extravagant in divinity (may we say), but that some obstinate opinionative man or other has maintained it, and made a wretched shift to countenance his opinion by the authority of scripture miserably wrested and perverted to his purpose. But what then? This makes no more against the perspicuity of the holy writings in all necessary doctrines, than the wild opinion of that old philosopher who affirmed snow to be black, disproves the clearness and certainty of those informations which proceed from the senses.

Let not a man therefore say, that the scripture is not plain in those things in which

which we pretend it is, because in those very things the church of God hath understood it one way, and Arius, Socinus, or some such broacher of heresy, another. For this proves nothing, but that there have been men hardy enough to deny somewhat, which all the world before them allowed: But it is by no means an argument of the obscurity of scripture expression, unless we could know certainly, that these men were honest and upright in their searches, acted with no by-designs, had no vain end which they proposed to themselves, of heading a party, or baffling received opinions; came to search these books without bias, prejudice, or any pre-engagements to some opinions of their own, which they were willing and resolved to find there. Without all this, and a great deal more, be proved (which indeed is not capable of proof), the scriptures may be clear, though men of clear reason in other things do not or will not understand them.

Well then, the obscurity of scripture carries no objection at all in it, either against the goodness or wisdom of God; for in all things necessary to be understood, it is obvious and plain; and in what is unnecessary to be understood there are many good and wise reasons why it should not be plain. In the mean time, let those who reject scripture be pleased to find us out a system of religion delivered by God without any of these difficulties in it. We desire no more of them, but to leave us in possession of our bibles, till they can shew us a clearer revelation, and more worthy of the divine Revealer.

If to this they shall say (as many in our own times do say), What need of any revelation at all? Reason is clear, and by that we may guide ourselves; God has implanted a light in every one sufficient to shew him the way to heaven:—we must ask them, whether natural religion speaks so plainly in any one point of religion, but that some perverse man or other has contradicted it? And then, by their own rule concerning the obscurity of scripture, that point is not plain from reason, because rational thinking men have denied its plainness. So that a man who, on the account of the obscurity of holy writ, shall pretend to reject the Christian religion, and turn deist, must, upon

the same account, reject deism too, and turn atheist. For there are a great many things in the notion of a God, and of that worship which natural religion directs us to pay him, that he can never satisfy himself about, nor thoroughly understand. Nay, he must not stay at atheism neither, for the very same reason; since no system of that kind can be contrived, which is not in many parts of it obscure and unintelligible. A great instance of which we have in the writings of that modern atheist Spinoza. In a word, he must be nothing, believe nothing, be of no opinion, but live under an indifference to all truths and falsehoods, in a pendulous state of mind; necessitated to act continually in order to some end supposed to be true, and yet doubting whether there be any such thing as truth or no; living under all the agonies and torments of a rooted scepticism.

Thus have I considered largely, and in some measure endeavoured to remove the first ill use that is made of the doctrine of the text by those perverse and unreasonable men, who take an advantage from the confessed obscurity of some parts of scripture, to dispute the authority of it.

I now hasten to mention some other ill uses that are made of what is owned here in the text, that there are in the inspired writings *things hard to be understood*.

And indeed, after what has been already discoursed, I need do little more than mention them; for to represent them, will be to disprove them.

Secondly, therefore, I observe, that it follows not from thence, as the Romanists would infer, that because of these obscure passages in scripture, there is absolute need of a supreme judge in controversies, who should determine the sense of every text, and among many false meanings of it, infallibly guide us into the only true one. I say, it by no means follows from hence that such a judge is necessary, for this plain reason; because, as we have heard, none of those points that are always obscure and doubtful, are necessary to be determined. In these every man may abound in his own sense, and have his own opinions to himself; and if he does but maintain those opinions with sobriety and modesty, without rending the unity, or disturbing the peace of the church,

church, though he may be under an error, yet that error shall not be rigorously imputed to him.

Much less does it follow from hence,

Thirdly, That, because of these obscurities in scripture, therefore the book itself should be taken out of the people's hands. For though there are some things in it hard to be understood, yet many, nay most things there are easy to be understood, as that very expression in St. Peter intimates. And how unreasonable therefore is it, to make some dark passages in holy writ a pretence of locking up all at once, without distinction, from the generality of Christians; because there are a few things there, which they cannot understand, therefore to let them understand nothing at all. And this is so much the harder, because (as we have heard) all that is necessary to be understood, is evidently contained in scripture. So that to deprive a man of that which he can understand, and which also it is necessary he should understand, for the sake of somewhat contained in the same book, which he cannot understand, and which it is no matter whether he doth understand or no, is an unreasonable piece of cruelty.

I will be bold to say, that, upon the same grounds that the Roman church denies the people the liberty of reading scripture, she might have debarred them also the privilege of our Saviour's conversation while he lived upon earth. For there were several things, in the course of his instructions, hard to be understood; and therefore, for fear of misinterpreting those things, it was convenient, might she have said, that all ignorant, unskilful men should utterly abstain from his company. But our Saviour did not deter the common people from approaching him, because now and then he spake a dark parable. And therefore neither ought they to be withheld from reading his gospel, though there be some hard things there, which perhaps they will read without understanding.

But fourthly, and lastly, These ill uses of the doctrine of the text being removed, the truest and most proper use we can make of it is, from a sense of these things hard to be understood in scripture, to form ourselves into a deep humility and lowliness of mind, in the perusing them; to read that sacred volume with

a wise jealousy, and a wary distrust of our own selves; not with a conceited opinion of our own gifts and parts, as if we alone were able to fathom all depths, and to grasp all mysteries. Except ye receive my gospel as a little child, said our Saviour, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Mark, x. 15. And except ye read my gospel as a little child, may he be as well supposed to say, with such an humble and teachable temper, with such a freedom from vanity, prepossession, and prejudices, as belongs to that infant state, ye cannot enter into the deep things of it; those things which are expressly said to be revealed to babes, but hidden from the wise. Mat. xi. 25.

Let us therefore weigh and consider what we read as well as we can; but let us not too much indulge our private reasonings upon, and fanciful expositions of scripture. When we stick any where, let us modestly consult those who should know better than we, and whose particular business it is to understand and explain this sacred volume. Let us enquire what has been the interpretation generally received in the church of Christ in the purest ages of it. Or, if that be hard to come at, what is the opinion of our own church, that particular member of the mystical body of Christ, into which it has pleased the divine Providence to engraft us. When we have found it, let us resolve not lightly to vary from it; not without strong reasons and clear convictions to the contrary; and even then to do it with modesty, and be content to enjoy our own private opinions, without endeavouring to make proselytes, or troubling the peace of the church, for the sake of them. Let us pay a due deference, though not a blind obedience, to so great an authority. And let us not reverence her decisions only, but make use of her admirable words also, which she puts into the mouth of every one, who desires to grow in the knowledge of scripture.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy scripture to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

S E R M O N IV.

The same Subject continued.

2 PET. iii. 16.

Which they that are unlearned, and unstable, wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

FROM the former part of the verse I have already taken occasion to discourse to you largely concerning the obscurity of holy writ. In the latter part of it, which I have proposed now to handle, St. Peter gives us an account of the ill impressions that these difficult parts of scripture make often on the minds of weak Christians; they are wrested by them (he tells us) to their own destruction.

By unlearned men, the apostle means not such as wanted that which we commonly call learning, but such as were not well skilled in divine things. By unstable, such as not being well grounded in the faith, were, upon that account, easy to be drawn aside into pernicious opinions and destructive errors. Such, he says, as these, wrest, *i. e.* misunderstand, misapply, and pervert the writings of St. Paul, and the other scriptures: and this they do, to their own destruction; that is, to their eternal ruin in another world. So that the meaning of this whole passage is, that some men, not being firmly rooted and grounded in the true faith of Christ, and being by consequence of an uncertain and wavering judgment in matters of religion, were apt to make an ill use of the difficult places of scripture, and to turn them to such a sense as destroyed Christianity; and such therefore as could not but end in the destruction of those who asserted and maintained it.

This at first sight perhaps may seem an hard saying. What, will some men say, shall a man be ruined eternally for a misunderstood place of scripture? Shall they who own the divine authority of holy writ (as it is plain these persons did), and who are studious to know and embrace the true sense of it every where, if in some obscure passages they should mistake

it, be answerable for that mistake, at the hazard of their salvation?

Better, at this rate, had it been, that the bible should never have been given men, if it be so very fatal a thing to make a wrong exposition, even of the most doubtful and intricate parts of it.

I shall endeavour to give an answer to this complaint, by stating the just bounds, and shewing the great reasonableness, of St. Peter's assertion; and shall then make use of the truth of the text, thus explained and justified, in some observations and inferences that it will afford us.

In order to state the bounds of the assertion, it will be fit to consider, more particularly,

- I. What is strictly to be understood here by wresting of scripture.
- II. What kind of passages in scripture they were, that are said to have been thus wrested.

I. As to the first of these, it must be considered, that, to wrest scripture, doth in strictness of speech signify, not only to misinterpret and misunderstand it, out of weakness and ignorance, as any Christian may blamelessly do, but with some degree of perversity and wilfulness to force an unnatural and false construction upon it, in order to make it fall in with our corrupt opinions and prejudices, which we have beforehand entertained, and resolved not to part with. Thus much is intimated by the original word *επιβλέω*, which signifies, either to detort or turn away, or to torment, and put to the question. In the first of these senses, when applied to scripture, it implies, that these wresters of it bent and warped the straight line and measure of their duty, on purpose to make it suit with their own crooked opinions. In the second (which comes to much the same), that they did, as it were, torment and vex it, till it spake according to their minds.

II. We are to observe, what kind of passages in scripture they were, which these men are said to have wrested. They were such as were hard to be understood (so the preceding words speak), and such as, for that very reason, there was no necessity that they should understand; and yet these men would pretend to understand them, and to be very positive also, and peremptory in their opinions concerning

cerning them. Further it appears, that these places treated not of slight indifferent points of doctrine, but of such as were of the utmost concern and moment; such as were the foundations of the Christian faith, and the very pillars that supported the whole frame of religion. I say, it appears, that they treated of such points as these, from the foregoing parts of this chapter, where St. Peter discourses of the day of judgment, of its certainty, and of the wise reasons for which God was pleased to delay it; and represents some men as scoffing at these doctrines, and saying, *Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were.* Ver. 4. To convince these scoffers, he urges the authority of St. Paul to them; who in his epistles had maintained the same assertions, not always however expressed with such a degree of evidence and clearness as might be thought necessary to prevent all mistakes; from whence ill men had taken an occasion to abuse his words to a quite different sense, and to pervert his meaning. So that the points of doctrine to which these wrested texts referred, were great and fundamental ones; and which it was of the last importance to be rightly instructed in. And to this we may add also a

Third remark, That this forced interpretation of obscure passages was in opposition to other plain and evident texts. For since (as I have already discoursed to you) there is no point of moment, but what is somewhere or other plainly and perspicuously delivered in scripture, and since these wrested places of scripture, which St. Peter speaks of, related, as you have heard, to points of moment; it follows, that they who wrested them, did it in contradiction to other plain and perspicuous parts of holy writ.

The full import of the text therefore, under these several explications, will be, that they who, being misled by pride and vanity, or any other lust and passion, perverted the sense of scripture, in order to make it suit with their own wicked practices, or justify their ill opinions, who vexed and tortured texts in order to make them speak such language as was for their purpose, who did this in passages vary hard to be understood, and therefore not necessary to be understood, and in

points of doctrine which were of the utmost concern and importance, and interpreted these passages, in relation to these points, quite contrary to other plain and express places of scripture: these men, I say, are very justly and reasonably said to have wrested the scriptures to their own destruction. For surely there was such a complication of insincerity, pride, and obstinacy, in this manner of wresting scripture, as deserved such a condemnation.

And therefore to that question, Shall a man be eternally ruined for a misunderstood place of scripture? we answer, Yes doubtless, under those circumstances which we have before explained, if it be a fundamental point, about which he is mistaken, and be much his own fault, that he is mistaken. A misunderstood place of scripture may overthrow one of the prime articles of faith, which God has made necessary to be believed in order to salvation: or it may destroy the morality of the gospel, by introducing a loose opinion concerning life and manners. By wresting one single passage of holy writ, a man may either deny the Lord who bought him (2 Pet. ii. 1.), or turn the grace of God into lasciviousness. Jude, iv. And he that does either of these, cannot be said to be severely dealt with, though he be cut off from the mercies of the gospel. For a life led in opposition to the plain practical rules of Christianity, or without that faith which Christianity requires, are either of them a sufficient cause of our condemnation. And therefore such a wilful wresting of scripture, as occasions either of these, must in its consequence be damnable, and excuse God in pronouncing this sentence, from all manner of severity or rigour in his dealings with us. This is the account of the true meaning of St. Peter's assertion in the text, and of the justness also, and reasonableness of it. Which points being thus stated and cleared, I come now, as I proposed, to make use of them, in some observations and inferences that they afford us. And,

First, it may be observed, that the scriptures were perverted, and turned by ill men to ill purposes, in the times of the apostles themselves; that they were no sooner written, but they were wrested. From whence we may learn these two things;

1st, That if this happened in the apostles days, then well might it happen in after-times, especially in this age, which is at so great a distance from the time of the apostles writing. We may cease to wonder, how it has come to pass, that so many controversies have been started about the sense of scripture, that it has been urged to so many wrong and different purposes, and brought to support and countenance so many heretical opinions, in latter days, when we find that, during the lives of St. Paul and St. Peter themselves, it was thus insincerely and unfairly dealt with. The ink was hardly dry, which fell from the apostles pens, but men began to dispute about the words that were wrote in it; to misconstrue and misapply them, every one to such doctrines as pleased him best; and to draw from the inspired writings things destructive of faith and salvation, in the face of the inspired authors of them, without asking, or at least without taking their opinions in the point; who surely had been the properest men to have given an account of their own meaning. And if these things were so then, what wonder is it, if ever since, and especially now, in these dregs of time, there be wilful men found, who will oppose their own vain fancies and novelties to the general sense of the whole body of Christians, and not submit themselves to such a concurrent testimony in the exposition of scripture, as, though of the utmost moment towards determining our assent, yet falls far short of infallibility and inspiration?

From the same observation also we may learn, in the

2d place, That an unerring expounder of scripture is not so useful and necessary as some men would make us believe it is; because if there were such an one, and he were known and acknowledged to be such by all men, yet would not that secure all men from misinterpreting scripture, as is plain from the instance of the text. The apostles were certainly unexceptionable interpreters of their own writings, and infallible judges of all controversies that could arise from them; and yet notwithstanding this, their writings were in their own time perverted, to countenance erroneous and heretical doctrines; and so doubtless would they be now, though there were an infallible

judge upon earth still. And vain therefore is the pretence of our adversaries of the church of Rome, that such an infallible judge is necessary, to assure us of the true sense of scripture, and put an end to all controversies concerning it; since plain it is, that, when there was such an infallible judge, he did not put an end to all controversies of this kind: there were still a great many proud, pertinacious, and opiniative men left, that would not be concluded by him.

Now if the inferring the necessity of God's acting in such or such a manner, from the convenience that would redound to mankind from his so acting, be no very good argument in divinity, even when that convenience is allowed; what a kind of argument must that be, which would prove the necessity of an infallible judge, from the great expedience of it towards determining all controversies, when even that expedience itself (as we have seen) wants to be proved?

But to go on. We may observe from St. Peter's assertion in the text,

Secondly, What temper of mind, what precautions, what degree of knowledge are requisite, in order to make our inquiries into the obscure parts of scripture innocent and useful to us. It is plain that this is an attempt of some hazard; and that it may happen to cost us dear, as it did those in the text, if we do not fitly prepare and guard our minds against the danger of it: which may be done, if we manage our searches of this kind by these following rules and directions.

1st, We must take care that the end we propose to ourselves in these inquiries be good and laudable. They must not be entered upon out of mere curiosity and wantonness, not out of a vain and fruitless desire of knowledge, nor out of a design of being more skilful and learned than other men, and of appearing to understand every thing; but the end of all our searches in this case ought to be, that we may improve in the skill of those divine truths, which were on purpose committed to writing, that there might be matter in holy writ, fit always to employ our repeated meditations, and to exercise our strictest attention: that we may by such searches gain to ourselves higher and more enlarged apprehensions of God, a truer and clearer sense of the deep wisdom of all his mysterious dispen-

sations; and may thus raise up our minds into greater degrees of holy admiration, reverence, and awe.

We must intend to qualify ourselves by these searches for the removing the objections raised by those who are no friends to scripture, for the justifying the darkest as well as the brightest parts of it, and making out to fair unprejudiced men the beautiful harmony of all the different but agreeing branches of the divine revelation.

2dly, We must come to this work, as with a right intention, so with a mind rightly disposed and qualified to pursue that intention: not presuming on our own strength; not with an high opinion and conceit of our particular gifts, abilities, or advantages, as if we alone were able to clear up all difficulties, and to go to the bottom of all mysteries, and that nothing were too hard for us. This is not a temper of mind, either naturally fitted for such a work, or which God delights to bless with supernatural assistances and discoveries. No, if ever we hope to make our inquiries of this kind successful and profitable to us, we must be sure to conduct them with great modesty, with a becoming diffidence and distrust of ourselves, humbly and chiefly relying upon God for his gracious help and assistance; and in order to it, putting up frequent and fervent petitions to that good Spirit which indited the holy scriptures, that he would please to enlighten us with the knowledge of all the deep mysteries contained there. It is humility and devotion that principally qualify us for such searches as these; and will do more by themselves, towards giving a man a true understanding of scripture, than all the gifts and parts in the world will do, when separated from them. For it is true in this instance, as well as in many others, that *God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the lowly.* James, iv. 6.

And, as a good way to keep alive and improve this humility of mind in us, let us be sure,

3dly, In our searches of this kind ever to carry this truth along with us (a truth I have largely explained, and proved to you in a former discourse), that there is no place of holy writ hard to be understood, that is needful to be understood by us: if we maintain this reflection con-

stantly upon our minds, it will teach us not to lay too great stress upon these difficulties, nor to employ too much of our time upon them, so as to be in the least taken off from considering what is more plain and profitable in scripture, what can more easily and usefully be understood, and is indeed more necessary to be understood by us. Some men pore so much and so long upon passages of a disputed meaning, as if they thought it indispensably requisite to determine themselves of one side or other of the question; as if the whole of religion were concerned in such difficult inquiries: they are so busy in opening and explaining hard places, that they forget to meditate upon plain ones, and to govern their lives under a lively and vigorous sense of the doctrines contained in them: which is doing just as the Pharisees did, *tithing mint and rue, and all manner of herbs, and passing over judgment and the love of God.* Luke, xi. 42. Whereas (as our Saviour in that case decides), *These ought they to have done, and not to have left the other undone.* A due reflection therefore upon this truth, that the understanding the obscure places of scripture is not a thing strictly required of us, or needful for us, will be of use to moderate our too great eagerness in the pursuit of such kind of knowledge; to render us less impatient and uneasy under what we do not understand of it, and less positive and dogmatical in what we do. And thus the two greatest temptations towards perverting scripture will be removed, an excessive curiosity in searches of this kind, and an over-weening fondness for our own private interpretations and opinions.

4thly, If we would not wrest the hard places in scripture, we must be sure to make that an inviolable rule and law to ourselves, never to expound them so as to oppose perspicuous and clear ones: but so to order our interpretation of doubtful points, as to make them fall in with the clear and intelligible parts of the same revelation; so as together with them to make up one complete body of truths, perfectly agreeing with each other.

The best way of knowing whether a line be crooked or not, is to apply it to one that is confessedly straight; and the purest way of not erring in obscure passages,

passages, is to make plain texts the measure and judge of them. The greatest part of the abuses and misrepresentations of scripture have arisen from a contrary management; from men's giving obscure texts a new and particular sense of their own first, and then growing fond of that invention afterwards, and resolving to bring all the plainest passages in scripture, whether they will or no, to countenance and comply with it.

That we may carry ourselves after a quite different manner in our searches, it is fit for us to observe,

5thly, and lastly, That the safest and securest way of looking into these *δυσνόητα* of St. Paul and the other holy writers is, to postpone the consideration of them, till we have mastered what is sure and easy in scripture, till we have rooted and grounded ourselves in those points of doctrine that lie obvious and open; and when we have done that, there will be no danger of looking into any thing else, let it be never so hard and never so obscure. For either we shall hit upon the right interpretation of it, or, if we do not, the wrong one shall not hurt us. A man that holds all that is plainly contained in scripture, and all that is necessary to be held by him, may in that which is not plain, and not necessary, innocently abound in his own sense. For though he should in these matters mistake in his opinions, and mistake the sense of scripture, upon which he grounds those opinions, yet those mistakes cannot be fatal, because not fundamental. He can never maintain any thing directly repugnant to the Catholic faith, and evidently destructive of it; and while he does not, he may maintain what else he pleases; and so he does it with sobriety and modesty, and a due deference to the opinion of those who have a right to be listened to in these things, his error (if it be one) shall never prove dangerous, or be imputed to him. And this remark is what is plainly suggested to us by the words of the text, where St. Peter tells us, that those which wrested the hard places in St. Paul's writings, and the other scriptures, were

the unlearned and unstable, that is (as I told you), those who, being not well grounded in the faith, were easy to be drawn aside into pernicious opinions and destructive errors: from whence it follows, that the best way to secure ourselves from thus perverting what is obscure in scripture is, first, to render ourselves learned and stable in what is plain; and fixing that as our centre, from whence we are not to be removed, we may extend our thoughts and opinions to what circumference we please. That faith which we keep pure and undefiled in fundamentals, shall either enable us to find out those truths of lesser moment, that perfectly agree with it, or shall excuse us before God, if we should miss of them. There will be a probability from hence of our understanding obscure texts rightly; or if we do not, yet there will be a certainty of our not incurring the guilt of wresting scripture to our own destruction.

Thus have I dispatched the second general observation, which I raised from the text, viz. to consider from thence what temper and qualifications of mind, what precaution and degrees of knowledge are requisite, in order to make our inquiries into the obscure parts of holy writ innocent and useful to us.

I might observe also from hence, in the 3d place, that if perverting obscure passages of scripture be a thing in itself damnable, as St. Peter assures us it is, how much more certainly damnable is it to pervert plain ones? And then infer,

4thly, and lastly also, That if such a sentence be pronounced upon those who wrest scripture, then surely a much higher degree of punishment is reserved for those who affront and ridicule it. But because the first of these points has been already in some measure intimated in the preceding discourse, and there occasionally explained; and because the second is of too extensive and concerning a nature to be now considered, I shall therefore at present insist upon neither of them. They may perhaps employ our reflections on some other opportunity.

S E R M O N V.

The public Manner in which the Gospel was at first promulged, one considerable Evidence of its Divine Authority.

ACTS, xxvi. 26.

This thing was not done in a corner.

IT might be hoped that, in a country where the religion of Christ is not only publicly professed, but interwoven into the civil frame, and established by a law, the truth of Christianity might at all times be taken for granted; and that the ministers of Christ might have nothing to do, but to build on that foundation, and be ever employed in exciting men to a practice suitable to their profession, and to *adorn the doctrine of our God and Saviour in all things.* Tit. ii. 10. But alas! the frequent and daring attempts of infidelity interrupt us in our course, make it necessary for us to *lay again the foundation* (Heb. vi. 1.), (as the apostle speaks), and to apologize for Christianity, just as if it were now in its infant state, and newly setting forth in the world.

God forgive them who put us upon this unwelcome task!—In the mean time, we, I am sure, were not to be forgiven, should we appear less solicitous to support and vindicate that faith, into which we were baptized, and to the preaching of which we are peculiarly dedicated, than some men are to undermine and destroy it. And of all the circumstances which add a particular strength to the evidence given for the truth of the gospel, there is none more advantageous to it, than the consideration of that fair, open, and illustrious manner, wherein it was proved and propagated by Christ and his apostles. There was no affectation of privacy in what they said or did; their doctrines were preached, and their miracles wrought, in broad day-light, and in the face of the world; in the most frequented places, before thousands and ten thousands of witnesses: *This thing,* says St. Paul (in his admirable apology before Agrippa and Festus), *was not done in a corner.*

I shall briefly open and illustrate this truth, in order to (what I chiefly intend) the drawing from thence some useful observations and improvements, which it will naturally afford us.

I. When our Saviour began to publish the gospel of his kingdom, he did not, as deceivers use to do, vent his new doctrines, or pretend to perform his wonders (the evidence of his divine mission), in places where there was no body fit to oppose the one, or to disprove the other. From the first moment he entered upon his office, he appeared publicly; he taught, he conversed, he did miracles publicly; [not gaining upon mankind by stealth, not opening his pretences darkly at first, and to a few; and then, by their means, drawing in others, and going on thus under-hand to form an interest, and to establish a party, which, as soon as he should make his public claim, might immediately come in to him, support, and own him. No!] he broke out upon the world all at once, came into the midst of men without any partisans or followers, presently opened his commission, and took upon himself the character of an ambassador from heaven.

Throughout the whole course of his ministry, he addressed himself constantly to multitudes, lived chiefly in great towns and cities, and in the most frequented parts of them, the streets, the market-places, the temple, and the synagogues; where his life, and doctrine, and miracles might, by his professed enemies, be narrowly observed and examined. And if at any time he withdrew into the desert, and did wonders there, it was not in order to fly the eyes of men, but that he might have room, by that means, to manifest his divine power, and preach his heavenly truths to yet greater numbers. [Accordingly we find with him in the wilderness, three thousand witnesses of a miracle, at one time, and even five thousand at another.] And therefore, when the high priest questioned him concerning his disciples and his doctrine, he made this reply, *I spake openly to the world, I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing; why askest thou me? Ask them which heard me what I have said unto them; behold, they know what I said.* John, xviii. 20, 21.

The

The beginning of miracles that Jesus did was before much company, at a marriage feast; and the last he wrought were in the midst of Jerusalem, where the whole nation of the Jews were then assembled to celebrate the passover. And whenever he manifested his divine mission by the chief seal and evidence of it, his raising any one from the dead, he took care, at that time especially, to be surrounded with numbers.

He pitched upon such persons for the subjects of his miraculous cures, whose infirmities and diseases were notorious, and of a long standing: one who had been blind from his very birth, another diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, and a third troubled with a palsy for thirty-eight years; so that there could be no possible confederacy in a case, where the person cured was known to have laboured under that distemper some years before our Saviour was born.

He so ordered the matter, that some of those he healed should immediately repair to the pharisees and priests, his inveterate and powerful enemies, and give them an opportunity of detecting the fraud, if there were any: that others should be soon after called before the sanhedrin itself, and strictly questioned about the reality of their cure, that so these facts might have the earliest and strongest confirmation possible from the fruitless inquiry and opposition of those who were most loth to believe them. At least, when he healed any person in private, without thus directing him to notify the cure, he then enjoined secrecy to him, on purpose to obviate all possible suspicions of art and contrivance.

As he had lived, so he died, in public, expired upon a cross, in the top of an eminence near Jerusalem. When buried he had a public guard set upon his grave, and he arose from thence in the presence of that very guard, and to their astonishment. He appeared afterwards to five hundred brethren at once, to the twelve disciples frequently; ate, drank and conversed with them for forty days, and was at last taken up into heaven in their sight, by a slow and leisurely ascent.

In all respects and circumstances the gospel of Christ shewed itself to proceed from the great Father of Lights, in whom is no darkness at all. It was est-

ablished upon proofs as authentic, public, and solemn as can well be imagined; bright, evident, and powerful as the sun at noon-day. As its founder once appealed to his disciples, and said, *Handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.* Lu. xxiv. 39. So may the doctrine itself make a like challenge to its enemies, and say, "Handle me, and see, for delusion and imposture hath not such substantial evidences, so open, ocular, and sensible a demonstration to boast of as I have." This thing was not done in a corner.

II. Having thus briefly explained and illustrated the truth contained in these words, I shall now apply myself to what I chiefly intended, the drawing from thence those several useful observations and improvements with which it will furnish us. And the

(1.) First use I will make of it shall be, to shew from thence how great an advantage the Christian religion hath, on this account, over all other religions, whether true or false, not excepting even the dispensation of Moses.

It is true, scarce any religion ever set up in the world without pretending, sooner or later, to derive its authority from miracles. But then, either those miracles (as they are called) have been acted confessedly in secret, or, if they are said to have been done in public, yet the account which was given of them, came too late to deserve credit, or to leave room for a disproof; and in both these cases the pretence to them is very suspicious.

Thus, in the first instance, Numa's nightly conferences with a goddess, was a figment, for which the people of Rome had his word only; the truth of the whole transaction was resolved into his single testimony. And such was Mahomet's vain boast of his receiving the several chapters of his alcoran from the angel Gabriel, for he wrought no public miracle to enforce this private one; nor did he, that we can learn, pretend to the power of working any. On the contrary, when miracles were demanded of him, he at first (as his followers have done ever since) appealed to the alcoran itself, as to the greatest and most convincing miracle, which was written (he said) in such a manner, as to carry upon it the plain stamp and evidence

dence of its own divine authority. And this was the only way in which he could make out his intercourse with the angel Gabriel.

Thus again, the several idolatrous religions in the East and West Indies, are said to have received their sanction from miracles done by the first authors and founders of them: but then the reporters of these facts are so much later than the facts themselves, that it is impossible to have any rational assurance concerning the reality of them; [their Mango-Copal, Amida, Brama, and Zaca, are supposed to have achieved wonders] at a time when there was no way of transmitting accounts of them to posterity but by memory alone, and some thousands of years before there could be any written monuments of them. Now this, I say, is to build the proof of divine truths upon the certainty of some accounts, whereof men can never be certain; it is to establish the belief of a revelation upon things done, or said to be done, in a corner, and which require a new revelation to make them credible.

The Jewish religion was indeed published by God in a very open and solemn manner, before a whole nation, with thunders and lightnings, and the sound of heavenly trumpets, on the top of Mount Sinai. Yet still infidelity finds room to object, that the truth of this revelation depends upon the testimony of friends only, and that the scene of it is laid in a place where nobody could be present but the persons concerned to support the account, whether true or false. And should any of these persons have been inclined to contradict it, yet they could not, because the whole race of them perished in the wilderness, ere a correspondence was as yet opened between them and any other people.

Such objections, it is true, are of no weight, laid in the balance with the evidence given for the truth of those facts; yet is it some advantage to the proof of gospel miracles, not to be liable even to these little exceptions, and on no side to lie open to any doubts or suspicions whatsoever. And from hence we may take occasion to consider also, in the

(2.) Second place, how inexcusable they are, who, notwithstanding that open, incontestable manner in which the divine authority of the gospel was manifested,

continue still to stand out against it; to resist, and even to deride the utmost efforts made by an omnipotent arm towards asserting the mission of Jesus; to parallel them with the mock wonders of Satan, and the impostures of false prophets, and to insinuate, as if they were all equally done by collusion. Such was he whose name ought not to be mentioned without reproach, and whom therefore I shall not mention: but his words are these: "If we look (says he) upon the impostures wrought by confederacy, there is nothing, how impossible soever to be done, that is impossible to be believed. For two men conspiring, the one to seem lame, the other to cure him with a charm, will deceive many; but many conspiring, one to seem lame, another to cure him, and all the rest to bear witness, will deceive more." Which was intended to suggest, that the miraculous cures recorded in the gospel were not really cures, but cheats, and concerted between the seeming objects and authors of them, though the relation of several of those cures be, as I shewed before, so circumstanced as to make this account of them not only ridiculous but impossible. He might as well have pretended to explain the miracle of our Saviour's giving eyes to the blind, by reasoning on the medicinal virtues of the clay and the spittle employed on that occasion.

The men who talk at this rate (as I fear many men now do, and that openly, and not in a corner), who can bring themselves thus to confound the plainest marks of truth and falsehood, reality and imposture, and to impute the most clear and demonstrative proofs that ever were given of a divine power to confederacy and a juggle; such men, I say, are inexcusable upon all the accounts of right reason and good sense, and incurable by all further methods of proof that can possibly be addressed to them. They are infidels, not because they want sufficient grounds of conviction, but because they resolve not to be otherwise. To no purpose is it to dispute with them about these foundations of our faith; to no purpose is it to exhort, beseech, persuade or reprove them: their eyes are shut, that they cannot see, and their ears stopped that they cannot hear, and their hearts hard as the nether mill-stone. Our reasonings

sonings of this kind may indeed be of some use, in respect of those who are yet untainted with the principles of infidelity, and may serve to keep such free from the infection; but to suppose that any good can be done by them upon those who pretend to have weighed the evidence of the gospel in a balance, and to have found it light, is a supposition, fit only for those to make who have not tried it. A

(3.) Third thing which we learn from the doctrine of the text is, to satisfy ourselves of the vanity of those pretences which are made to miracles in the Romish communion. The members of it boast very much of mighty signs and wonders wrought by some canonized and some uncanonized saints; their legends, their sermons are full of them; even their great advocate lays such a stress upon the number and kinds of them, as to make the glory of miracles one of the fifteen notes by which that church may be discerned to be the only true church of Christ. But now, as confidently and publicly as they make these boasts of miracles, we may observe, that the miracles themselves are said to have been done very privately, in religious houses, and places of secrecy and retirement; in remote regions of the world, whither no body will go to disprove them; in superstitious countries, where no man hath a mind, or leave, to examine them: and these are circumstances which smell strongly of imposture and contrivance; for why should things designed for public use and influence be thus transacted in the dark, without witnesses? A miracle is, in the nature of it, somewhat done for the conversion of infidels. It is a *sign*, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not, 1 Cor. xiv. 22. And yet it so happens, that popish miracles are generally done at home, before believers, where there is little or no need of them, or doubts concerning them; or, if abroad, yet they are placed at such a convenient distance, as not to lie within reach of confutation. In China and Japan these wonder-workers may pretend to have done as many miracles as they please, without the fear of a discovery. In Spain and Italy they may venture, now and then, to set up for them, where there are so many always ready to favour their pretences, and to run into any pious fraud

that can be contrived for them. But in heretical countries (as they term ours) they are very shy and sparing of their talent this way; and still, the more heresy there is in a country, the fewer miracles are heard of there. How can a man choose but suspect these odd stories, told under such suspicious circumstances? How can he be blamed for not entertaining them? For, as our Saviour's brethren once reasoned with him (and they reasoned right, though they applied it wrong), so may we with one of these pretenders to miracles: *There is no man doth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly: if thou do these things, shew thyself to the world.* John, vii. 4. And whoever totally declines this trial, must not expect to have any credit given either to the miracles he pretends to have done, or to the message he brings.

But the most absurd pretence of this kind, and the most opposite to the doctrine delivered, is that famous miracle of the corporal presence in the eucharist, which is done so much in the dark, that nobody ever did or can see it, either before or after it was done, or even while it is doing; no, not the doer himself, as loudly as he may boast of it. The miracles of the gospel are so many appeals to the senses of men, but this is a strange new kind of miracle, which is perfectly invisible. To say that it must be received by faith, that we must believe it to be a miracle, is to destroy the very end and design of miracles, which are works done, in order to procure the belief of somewhat else, and are not therefore themselves to be believed, and taken for granted. In a word, it is a miracle, the doing of which is so utterly a secret, that it wants another miracle to prove it to be one; and yet of all things in the world it is the most incapable of being proved this way; for miracles being, as I said, appeals to our senses, and transubstantiation a plain contradiction to them, the calling in of a miracle to evince the truth of this doctrine would be (as one very justly reasons) "to prove to a man by what he sees that he doth not see what he sees." Either therefore the pretended corporal presence is no miracle, or, if it be one, we are still excusable in not admitting it, since it comes to us in a way so very singular, and demands

mands our assent against the testimony of sense, upon the reports of which all other miracles are founded. Again,

(4.) Fourthly, The doctrine discoursed of teaches us likewise to reject all pretences to the spirit, to private visions, and inward illuminations, by which enthusiastical or designing men endeavour to establish their own particular opinions, and to give them a sacred authority. Should these strange things, they tell us, be true, yet they are transacted privately, between God and their own souls, and cannot therefore reasonably be made a foundation for the public reception of any doctrine or opinion. [For whenever God intends to establish any thing openly, he gives open proof and evidence of it. His notice reaches always as far as he designs to extend his revelation, and they therefore who have no sure sign or notice that a truth is revealed, cannot, in reason, be obliged to entertain it. Thus it would be, I say, supposing these visions and revelations alleged were really true, whereas we have indeed the best ground in the world for suspecting them to be false.] Since it is evidently contrary to all the divine methods of acting with which we are acquainted, that God should give a man a commission to publish a new doctrine, and not give him wherewithal to manifest the authority of his commission to others. *If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.* John, ii. 31. (says our Saviour). It is probable not true in itself; it is certainly not necessary to be embraced as true by those to whom I propose it, and therefore it follows, *The works that I do, they bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.* Ver. 36. The miracles which a man performs are the only convincing arguments of his being inspired; and his own affirmation in the case, when divested of these proofs, let it be never so peremptory, cannot reasonably induce a belief of what he affirms.

Thus, for instance, when the dispute was in the church of Rome between the two orders of Franciscans and Dominicans, about the immaculate conception, one side had visions and revelations for it, and the other side had visions and revelations against it; but neither side thought themselves obliged to take the word of the other, and the rest of the world who stood by did not think them-

selves obliged to take the word of either, but believed or disbelieved the immaculate conception, according as reason, scripture, and the authority of tradition seemed to determine them, and not according to the proportion of visions and revelations vouched for or against it.

5. It will be yet a fifth improvement of what hath been laid down, to observe from thence how it comes to pass that miracles have been so long discontinued, and do rarely, very rarely, appear in these latter ages of the world. They were performed at first in so conspicuous, exuberant, and convincing a manner, as to render a continual repetition of the same proofs utterly needless. Had indeed these first evidences of a divine power been displayed before a few only, or before many, but suspected witnesses, it might have been requisite perhaps to repeat them often in succeeding times [as often perhaps as any single convert to christianity was to be made]; but being originally wrought, as you have heard, in the face of the sun, before a whole nation of witnesses, and those witnesses enemies, the certainty of them was so well established and transmitted to after-ages, as that no fair, impartial considerer should be able to doubt of it; and such an one having no reason to dispute the truth of former miracles, could have no reason, no occasion to demand new ones. God governs the moral world as he doth the natural. He made it indeed, and ordered it, at first, by miracle; but he steers and conducts the affairs of it ever since by standing rules and laws, and by the ordinary ministry of second causes. And thus he established the truth of his revelation, at the beginning by miracle; but that being once done, he suffers things now to go on in their regular course, without offering every day motives of the same kind to men, but appealing to those which he hath proposed already; which he knows to be sufficient, and knows also, that if they do not suffice, no others will; according to that remarkable decision of our Lord's, *That such as bear not Moses and the Prophets* (i. e. reject a revelation already well attested by miracles) *would not be persuaded though one arose from the dead.* Luke, xvi. 31. Farther,

(6.) Sixthly, From the general drift and tenour of the argument we have been handling,

handling, it may be justly collected, that the more any doctrine affects secrecy, and declines trials of any sort, the more reason we have to suspect and to examine it: *Beloved, believe not every spirit* (says St. John), *but try the spirits, whether they be of God* (1 John, iv. 1.), and most particularly those spirits which desire to be believed, without being tried; for this looks as if they were afraid of being brought to the test, and fear generally arises from a consciousness of guilt, as the same apostle, in this very case, argues: *Every one* (says he) *that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved; but he that doth the truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.* John, iii. 20, 21.

This reflection cannot but once again put us in mind of those articles of the Roman Catholic faith, by which it stands distinguished from the faith of all other christians. We are not allowed to doubt of them, or to reason upon them. They are to be received implicitly, without any particular discussion and inquiry; from the great doctrine of infallibility they proceed, and into that they are finally resolved: *As the rivers run into the sea, into the place from whence the rivers come, thither do they return again.* Eccles. i. 7. And how can that which hath the stamp of unerring authority upon it, become the proper subject of any man's private debates and reasonings? Now this is the greatest prejudice imaginable against the truth of the doctrines of any church, or the sincerity of its pretences; for if what it proposeth to us be true and reasonable, why should it decline the examination and judgment of reason? If all be pure gold, without alloy, how comes it thus to fly the touchstone? It is the property of error only to sculk and hide its head, but truth we know is open and barefaced; like our first parents, in the state of innocence and happiness, naked, but not ashamed: and therefore, though it be very unreasonable in the church of Rome to impose her doctrines upon us, without allowing us to examine them, yet it is not unreasonable in us to reject these doctrines, thus proposed, even without examination.

The same may be said of those wild opinions set up by fanatics and enthusiasts as dictates of the Spirit, and which

they will suffer to be tried by the Spirit only, not by the dead letter of scripture, or by carnal reasoning. There needs no more than this very consideration to convince us of the absurdity of their pretences; for if scripture and reason were for them, they would not be against scripture and reason. Men do not use to decline the arbitration of their friends.

Far different from this is the conduct of that excellent church to which we belong. She deals openly and fairly, brings all her doctrines to the light, and invites all her members to search and inquire into them. She desires nothing more than to be tried at the bar of unbiassed reason, and to be concluded by its sentence. She knows that her testimony is true, and that the truth of it will appear the more, the more it is sifted. Even in those mysteries which she proposes as objects of faith, divinely revealed, she pretends not to shut out the use of reason, but only cautions us to exercise it soberly and discreetly, and to keep it within its due bounds: not to reject a divine truth, because we are ignorant of the particular manner in which it may be made out; not to reason from the properties of finite to those of infinite beings; not to pretend to find contradictions in points, the depth of which we cannot fathom or comprehend. Under these restraints, she encourages us to use our reason in the discussion of mysteries as freely as we please; and the questions not, but that the more freely we use it, the more reason we shall find to believe those mysteries, and to revere them.

Would to God all men dealt as fairly with her as she deals with all men! She would not then, by ill tongues and pens, be traduced, as guilty of pious cheats and priestcraft; things which she detests utterly, and hath done more toward exposing them, where they are practised, than any of those who make the loudest noise with them. She would not then have those accusations of imposture and design laid at her door, which she herself hath so often and justly charged on the church of Rome, accusations stolen by her adversaries from her matchless writings against that church, and applied to her, without ground or colour, without sense or reason. But our comfort is, that our case in this respect is like that of good David, when he appealed to

God,

God, and said, *The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me.* Psalm lxi. 9. These enemies of our church are equally enemies of all other churches, and all religions, only ours happens to be the fairest mark, because it is uppermost; for, were any other set up in the room of it, still the same cry of holy frauds and priestcraft would be heard against that also from the mouths of profligate persons, in licentious times. To cut off all occasion, as much as can be, from those who seek occasion, let us be sure, all of us who are members of this excellent church, let us be sure, I say, which is

The last thing I have to recommend to you from the text, To make our practice of the gospel like the first proofs of it, conspicuous and plain; and endeavour, with all our power, to recommend the doctrine we embrace to the hearts of men, as openly and powerfully, by our good lives and actions, as the first planters of it did by their miraculous performances. So shall we best put to silence the ignorance of foolish men; and be able, in the most convincing and effectual manner, to make an answer to our blasphemers.

The profession of the true and pure doctrine of Christ, and a practice suitable to that profession, are both often, in the New Testament, compared to light. Like that, they display their bright beams, and diffuse their quickening influence, enlightning and enlivening all that is near and far off, dissipating the mists of vice and ignorance, and discovering the hidden things of darkness. As to our profession of the pure doctrine of the gospel, that it sufficiently resembles light, is manifest and notorious: let us resemble it also in as illustrious and distinguishing a practice, and by *walking worthy, every way, of that vocation wherewith we are called.* Ephes. iv. 1. Let us resolve to be (as I trust we are) the purest church upon earth for our manners as well as for our doctrine: in one respect as well as the other, *a light placed on a candlestick, and not under a bushel; a city set upon an hill, that cannot be hid.* In a word, *Let our light so shine before men, that they seeing our good works, may glorify our Father which is in Heaven.* Matt. v. 14, &c.

S E R M O N VI.

A Discourse on religious Sincerity; wherein the true Marks and Tests of it are fully set forth.

2 COR. xiii. 5.

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the Faith: Prove your own selves.

THERE are three several ranks and orders of men, into which those *that name the name of Christ* (2 Tim. ii. 15.), and profess his religion, may be divided. Some have nothing more than the mere name and profession of christianity, for in their works they deny it, *being alienated from the life of Christ* (Ephes. iv. 18.), and paying no manner of obedience to his laws, but living in the open and avowed practice of all kind of pollutions. Others there are who as manifestly adorn the doctrine they embrace, and live up to the rule which they profess, so far as human infirmity will suffer them. They have, by the grace of God concurring with their sincere endeavours, subdued the power of their corrupt lusts and affections, so that little or no disturbance doth from thence arise to them, but they go on in the paths of virtue and the duties of piety evenly and regularly, glorifying God and benefiting men, and *shining more and more unto a perfect day.* Prov. iv. 18. And to each of these the state and condition of their own souls is known certainly and clearly: a strong conviction of guilt terrifies the one, without any offer of excuse or hope of pardon; and the conscience of the other bears witness to their uprightness, without doubts or misgivings. Between these there is a middle state of men, who are neither notoriously evil nor yet remarkably virtuous; neither entirely given over to work wickedness, nor yet thoroughly confirmed in goodness, but in a doubtful, uncertain way of living and thinking; sometimes standing firm in virtue, and sometimes failing; sometimes sinning and sometimes repenting, sometimes hoping and sometimes desponding.

To

To such as these the exhortation of the apostle in my text is directed: *Examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith: prove your own selves*; (that is), consider your condition impartially and thoroughly, try it by the rules of the gospel; satisfy yourselves once for all whether you be true sincere believers, such as God will accept. If you find that you are, resolve, by his grace, to continue such to your lives end: if you find you are not, resolve to make yourselves such, as soon as is possible, for nothing can be of more moment to you than this knowledge, and these resolutions. *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves.*

In order to assist you in this inquiry, it shall be the business of my present discourse to propose some few plain marks or tests, by which every man who entertains any doubts of this kind (as very good men sometimes do), may, if it please, try his own sincerity, and fully satisfy himself whether he be an hearty believer and a sound member of that body of which Christ Jesus is the head; whether, and how far, he hath obtained the great christian perfection, which is to recommend all the rest. I mean that of sincerity.

And first, The most obvious, and therefore the most satisfying mark of religious sincerity is, if a man, upon a review of his own thoughts, finds that his resolutions of obedience are universal and unlimited, without a reserve for any favourite sin, without excepting any particular instance of duty wherein he desires to be excused, *Then* (says the good Psalmist) *shall I not be ashamed*, i. e. Then may I safely confide in my own innocence and uprightness, *when I have respect unto all thy commandments* (Psalm cxix. 6.); when I find myself equally determined to obey every divine precept, and resolved to allow myself in no practice whatsoever which the law of God doth not allow of; and where this is not the case there can be no true christian sincerity, which consists in a true bent and inclination of the will towards God, and the will is never truly, but when it is totally, inclined towards him; when it is lost and swallowed up in the divine will, implicitly likes or dislikes, chooses or refuses what God hath before-hand approved or disapproved by his holy

precepts or prohibitions. Is a man said to be sincere to his friend, who betrays him in any one important secret committed to his trust, though he should be faithful in many others? Is a servant said to be sincere to his master, who hath any reserved cases, wherein he resolves not to consult his honour or interest? No more can a man be reckoned sincere towards God who sets up any single lust, inclination, or thought against what he knows to be the divine will and pleasure; and this is evidently the reason of that determination in St. James: *Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.* For (as it there follows) *he that said, do not commit adultery, said also, do not kill. Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law* (James, ii. 10, 11.): i. e. If thou neglectest to observe any one divine command, knowing it to be one, thou art in that instance as open and declared a rebel to the authority enacting it, as if thou shookst off thy obedience to all.

If then, upon a careful survey of ourselves, we find that we are, from the bottom of our souls, disposed and resolved to comply with all the terms of duty (whether grateful or ungrateful to flesh and blood) which the gospel proposeth to us: that it is our fixt intent not to do in any case what God hath forbidden, nor to neglect what he hath enjoined; and that there is no appetite, desire, or design, so dear to us but we are ready to part with it, as soon as its opposition to a divine command shall be made out:—if this, upon examination, prove to be our case, we have great reason to think well of ourselves, and to conclude, that we are in such a state of mind as God will accept and reward. A

Second and sure proof of religious sincerity may be drawn from a general view of the common course of our lives and actions. If there be an even tenour of goodness visible in our conduct, a regular and steady pursuit of virtue, without any gross and notorious failures in scandalous instances, and flagrant acts of wickedness; if, whenever we happen to fall by some great temptation, we continue not long and quietly under the guilt of it, but recover our ground forthwith, and return to our duty, proceeding on in the paths of obedience and an holy

holy life habitually, and discharging our obligations to God and man pretty evenly and uniformly, then may we from hence also make a comfortable guess at the goodness of our condition in this world, and nourish very promising hopes to ourselves of being happy in another. It is not to be expected that, while we are in the body, we should live altogether free from the stains and infirmities of it. In the very best of men their passions will sometimes prevail over their reason, and the strongest sense of their duty will give way to a present temptation. A pious man may, now and then, be very cold and languid in the performance of his devotions, and very full of distractions and wanderings. A meek and good man, by some unforeseen accident, and by several conspiring circumstances, may be raised up into an unbecoming pitch of anger and resentment. A temperate man may, through importunity, or for want of a due regard over himself, be gradually and insensibly betrayed into some degree of excess; but then, in all these cases, the person falling quickly comes to himself again, the fit is short and soon over, and is succeeded immediately by shame and remorse, by new resolutions and more vigorous endeavours. Consider the man altogether, and you will find, that the general current of his behaviour bears witness to his integrity, though he fail now and then in particular instances; and God, who sees all our actions at once, will judge us upon the whole view, and not single out our worst qualities, without any regard to our best, in order to exercise his severity upon us. Let no man therefore too hastily and too severely condemn himself for frequent infirmities, slips, and neglects; let no man who would judge aright of his spiritual estate, fix his eye too intently on some particular blemishes and failings of which perhaps he is conscious, but let him look rather to the main scope and drift of his thoughts, words, and actions, and by that let him try himself, as by the justest measure and standard of sincere goodness. How contrary to this is the conduct of some good and pious souls! How usual is it for persons well advanced in piety, when they are making such inquiries as these, to dwell altogether on their defects and miscarriages,

without regarding the regular course of a virtuous and well-ordered life, and to condemn themselves as false and insincere, because they are not perfect and sinless? God forbid that these should be the terms upon which we are to be dealt with! For where then would be the man upon earth who could undergo the scrutiny? *If thou, Lord, shouldst be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who may abide it?* Psal. cxxx. 3. A

Third sign and test of sincerity is, if a man be not content with any determined proportion of goodness, nor willing to sit down at such a point of virtue, as he hath already attained, without aiming at a further degree of increase and proficiency. For *the path of the just is as the shining light, says the wise man, shining more and more unto a perfect day* (Prov. iv. 18.): that is, the truly good are always aiming to be better, and how far soever they have run in the race of virtue, still urge onward, incessantly and eagerly; *forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, they press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.* (Phil. iii. 12.) A soul truly touched with the sense of its own sins and unworthiness, and of the infinite mercies and condescensions of God towards us, will never stint and bound itself in its returns; but will endeavour to love as much, and to obey as far as is possible. Let its attainments be what they will, yet it knows that they are short, extremely short of its obligations; that the measures of grace which we arrive at here, are only earnest and spurs, and helps towards larger communications and higher improvements; and therefore that a man is never so good as he ought to be, who doth not heartily desire and design to be as good as he can be; and breathe and pant after perfection itself, even in this life, though he be satisfied that it is not fully attainable, but in another; since withal he is satisfied, that the more uniformly and vigorously he presses toward the mark of perfection in this life, the nearer still shall he approach to it, though he shall never reach it; and the nearer he is towards reaching it here, the more glorious shall be his crown, and the more exalted his state of perfection hereafter. And therefore if any one find himself inclined

inclined to circumscribe his practice within such or such limits of duty, beyond which he never intends nor expects to go; to hold fast the pleasures of life, and to enjoy as much of them as ever he can, consistently with the principles of religion; arguing always for the utmost extent of his Christian liberty, and desiring to make his obligations as narrow as may be: such an one hath reason to conclude, that he is as yet short of those qualifications which are necessary to recommend him to the judge of all hearts, and discerners of spirits. A

Fourth mark or test by which a man may discover, whether he be sincerely religious or not is, to examine himself, whether he be as inclinable to exercise the graces and virtues of the Christian life in private as in public, without doing any thing merely for the applause or fear of men, but under a conscientious regard to him that seeth in secret, and under an expectation that he *who seeth in secret will*, at the great day of account, *reward him openly*. Mat. vi. 18. For example, let a man consider whether he be as punctual and exact in performing his closet devotions as in repairing to the public offices of the church, and as uneasy under the omission of the one as the other; and when he prays in private, whether he be as composed and reverent, and devout in his behaviour, as he is when the eyes of a great assembly are upon him. Again, as to points of mercy, generosity, and justice, let him reflect, whether he be as ready to give alms in private as in the streets, to defend the cause of the injured and oppressed, and to support a good man's reputation in such circumstances when he is sure never to hear of it again, as he would be if all the world heard and observed him: finally, whether he be as loth to defraud his neighbour in a great matter or a small, when he might do it securely, without fear of a discovery, as he should be if he were sure to be arraigned in a court of judicature for it. He that can truly answer these questions to his own satisfaction, hath no great reason to distrust his sincerity, and he who cannot hath as little reason to depend upon it.

Hypocrisy, when in perfection, will act real goodness so well, and put on the

shape and disguise of it so exactly, as to deceive even him who plays the part as well as those who look on, and create a belief in him that he is what he seems to be, till he compares himself with himself, his private with his public conduct: and that touchstone never fails to distinguish true from counterfeit piety; for the surest indications of men's characters are those actions and discourses which flow from them, when they are off of their guard, and under no awe or restraint from the eyes and observations of others. A

Fifth thing by which sincerity in religion manifests itself is, when a man appears to act, not out of bye-aims, and a private interest, but out of a true zeal for the honour of God, the interest of virtue, and the good of mankind. Would you satisfy yourself, whether you sincerely love such a relation, such an acquaintance, such a friend? Consider, do you on all occasions design to promote what is for their service and reputation? do you heartily desire and endeavour their good, without having an immediate eye on your own advantage in it? If you do, it is certain that your friendship and affection are sincere; for no man can give better proofs and assurances of it. And the case is the same with respect to God and religion. If a man feels himself inwardly warmed and acted by a true concern for the glory of God, for the honour of his name, and of his worship; if he be apt to undervalue worldly regards, and petty private views, in comparison of this great end; if in evil days, when the manners of men are extremely corrupted, he is not ashamed to act up to strict principles of virtue, which are not in fashion, nor is remiss in the practice of those duties, which he foresees will scarcely turn to account; espousing firmly and unalterably the cause of God and goodness, even when hundreds on his right hand have gone off and thousands have revolted on his left: in a word, when a man can be loose and sceptical with the general applause of the world, and cannot be otherwise, without being despised and pitied; and yet is so far from being tempted to a compliance, that he doth what he can to stem the torrent of impiety, and to make his virtue as conspicuous as other men's vices: when a man, I say, doth, upon reflection, find

find himself thus resolved and qualified, he hath great reason to be pleased with his condition, and to conclude, that it is well pleasing to God also; for there is no surer mark of integrity than a courageous adherence to virtue, in the midst of a general and scandalous apostacy, which is the reason that Noah and Abraham, Lot and Daniel, have so high an encomium bestowed on them in scripture, and are recommended as patterns of a strict, uncomplying uprightness, to all succeeding ages. Further,

Sixthly, It is no slight token of our sincerity in religion, if we are apt to suspect it on the account of little things, which is often the case of very devout christians, and who have really the least occasion to mistrust themselves of any men. Persons of a nice and tender conscience, very careful to please God, and very fearful of offending him, are, for that very reason, prone to imagine that they fall infinitely short of their duty, if they do not, in every respect, exactly discharge it, and to disquiet themselves on this account with many groundless scruples and terrors. Sometimes the principle from whence their repentance sprang gives them great uneasiness, for they remember, that the reformation of heart and life in which they are now well advanced, began at first not from a true and ardent love of God, but from the mere dread of punishment. Sometimes their unequal performance of religious duties dejects and dispirits them; they find themselves cold and unmoved when they are upon their knees; in the most solemn and raising parts of the service, and even at the reception of the blessed sacrament itself, they do not feel an holy warmth kindling in their hearts, nor their mind melting under the impressions that are then made upon it, and they conclude therefore, that there is a vein of hypocrisy running through all these performances, which makes them worthless and unacceptable. Now these, and such as these, I say, are for the most part the doubts and misgivings of the sincerely good and pious, for they are such as seldom trouble the consciences of men of a different character; and therefore, those very scruples which disturb good christians so much, would, if rightly un-

derstood, give them matter of sound comfort and encouragement; their very doubts concerning the goodness of their state are, if they had but the heart to think so, a sure reason why they should not doubt of it. Let not then the true saints and servants of God perplex and afflict themselves with such difficulties; let them not give up religion, by their means, to the laughter and scorn of prophane men, who, from a few such instances as these, take pleasure to represent it as residing only in weak brains, as the employment of melancholy and diseased minds, and who stick not, in the gaiety of their hearts, to say, that a strict piety is good for nothing but to make the owners of it troublesome to themselves, and useless to the rest of the world. O let not any one who wishes well to goodness, disserve the interest of it more by his unreasonable scruples than he promotes it by his exemplary practice! But let him resolve to summon up all his reasoning powers, and to set them in array against these insignificant phantasms and illusions, which would certainly retire before this single reflection (had a man but the courage to make and to believe it), that such niceties dwell usually there where there is least need of them, and are a real sign of that sincere piety, the want of which those who thus unhappily suffer under them deplore.

Seventhly, Another sure token of our sincerity in religion is, when we delight to read the holy scriptures, and have a savory taste and relish of them: when we find somewhat more in them than in mere human writings, and are apt to settle into a pious composure of mind while we are perusing them: when we come to them with satisfaction and eagerness, and are uneasy under any long discontinuance of our conversation with them. This is the token and character by which the experienced Psalmist teaches us to know a good man. *His delight (saith he) is in the law of the Lord, and in that law doth he meditate day and night.* Psal. i. 2. It is true, it may sometimes happen, that a person of a sound and sincere piety shall read the holy scriptures without being much warmed or affected with them. He may be under an indisposition and languor of mind; the

the business or pleasures of life, and worldly objects, may now and then take possession of his heart, and shut the door against spiritual impressions; but then this is not a common and every day's case; he is for the most part well disposed and affected towards this divine employment; his appetite is generally awakened, and his taste very good, *and he rejoiceth in God's word, as one that findeth great spoils.* Psal. cxix. 162. *Did not our heart burn within us* (said the good disciples), *while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?* Luke, xxiv. 32. But if a man can frequently peruse those sacred pages, without any degree of sensible emotion and concern, without being touched any ways by the matter of them, or awed by the majestic manner of expression which distinguishes them from all other writings, this is as sure an indication of a sick soul, as a palate which doth not relish the most savory meats is of a diseased body. *The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold; but the word of God trieth the hearts* (Prov. xvii. 3.); and it is quick and powerful (saith the author to the Hebrews), *and sharper than any two-edged sword; piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* Heb. iv. 12. And needs must that heart be very hard and callous, and almost past feeling, upon which so pungent and searching a medicine doth not operate.

These are the several marks or tests by which we may examine ourselves, whether we are in the faith, whether we are possessed of that truly christian sincerity which God above all things requires. Let us do it honestly and impartially; let us apply the rules which have been given, and take an estimate of the true state and condition of our souls by the means of them. If, upon a strict inquiry, we find that our hearts are right with God, let us give him the praise, and resolve, by his grace and blessing, to keep them so, *all the while our breath is in us, and the spirit of God is in our nostrils* (Job, xxvii. 3.); and endeavour to grow in this faith, and to increase in this grace more and more, *till we come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God,*

unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. Ephes. iv. 13. But if, after a serious review of our lives and consciences, it appears that they are not such as will strictly bear the test, let us form immediate resolutions of working ourselves up into those degrees of sincerity which we want, and of being as holy and blameless as we ought to be, *in all manner of conversation.* 1 Pet. i. 5.

May we every one of us so resolve, and be blessed in God's good time with an happy and comfortable effect of our resolutions, through the mighty assistances of his holy Spirit, purchased for us by the blood of his dear Son! To which eternal three be for ever ascribed all honour, adoration, and praise. Amen.

S E R M O N VII.

The Duty of Praise and Thanksgiving.

PSALM I. 14.

Offer unto God thanksgiving.

AMONG the many excellencies of this pious collection of hymns, for which so particular a value hath been set upon it by the church of God in all ages, this is not the least, that the true price of duties is there justly stated. Men are called off from resting in the outward shew of religion, in ceremonies and ritual observances, and taught rather to practise (that which was shadowed out by these rites, and to which they were designed to lead) sound inward virtue and piety.

The several composers of these hymns were prophets: persons whose business it was not only to foretel events, for the benefit of the church in succeeding times, but to correct and reform also what was amiss in that race of men with whom they lived and conversed; to preserve a foolish people from idolatry and false worship, to rescue the law from corrupt glosses and superstitious abuses, and to put men in mind of (what they were so willing to forget) that eternal and invariable rule, which was before these positive duties, would continue

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after

after them, and was to be observed, even then, in preference to them.

The discharge, I say, of this part of the prophetic office taking up so much room in the book of Psalms, this hath been one reason, among many others, why they have been always so highly esteemed, because we are from hence furnished with a proper reply to an argument commonly made use of by unbelievers, who look upon all revealed religions as pious frauds and impostures, on the account of the prejudices they have entertained in relation to that of the Jews: the whole of which they first suppose to lie in external performances, and then easily persuade themselves, that God could never be the author of such a mere piece of pageantry and empty formality, nor delight in a worship which consisted purely in a number of odd, unaccountable ceremonies. Which objection of theirs we should not be able thoroughly to answer, unless we could prove (chiefly out of the Psalms, and other parts of the prophetic writings) that the Jewish religion was somewhat more than bare outside and show; and that inward purity, and the devotion of the heart, was a duty then as well as now. One great instance of this proof we have in the words now before us, which are taken from a psalm of Asaph, written on purpose to set out the weakness and worthlessness of external performances, when compared with more substantial and vital duties. To enforce which doctrine, God himself is brought in as delivering it: *Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God.* The preface is very solemn, and, therefore, what it utters in we may be sure is of no common importance: *I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices, or thy burnt-offerings, to have been continually before me.* That is, I will not so reprove thee for any failures in thy sacrifices and burnt offerings, as if these were the only or the chief things I required of thee. *I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goat out of thy folds.* I prescribed not sacrifices to thee, for my own sake, because I needed them: *For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills.* Mine they are, and were, before ever I commanded thee to offer them to me; so that (as it follows) if I

were hungry, yet would I not tell thee; for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. But can ye be so gross and senseless as to think me liable to hunger and thirst? As to imagine that wants of that kind can touch me? *Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?*—Thus doth he expostulate severely with them, after the most graceful manner of the eastern poetry: the issue of which is, a plain and full resolution of the case, in those few words of the text—*Offer unto God thanksgiving.* Would you do your homage the most agreeable way? Would you render the most acceptable of services? *Offer unto God thanksgiving.*

The use I intend to make of these words is, from hence to raise some thoughts on that very excellent and important duty of praise and thanksgiving.

Offer unto God thanksgiving, which that we may do, let us inquire first, how we are to understand this command of offering praise and thanksgiving unto God, and then, how reasonable it is that we should comply with it.

Our inquiry into what is meant here will be very short: for who is there that understands any thing of religion but knows, that the offering praise and thanks to God implies, our having a lively and devout sense of his excellencies and of his benefits; our recollecting them with humility and thankfulness of heart, and our expressing these inward affections by suitable outward signs, by reverent and lowly postures of body, by songs and hymns, and spiritual ejaculations, either privately or publicly; either in the customary and daily service of the church, or in its more solemn assemblies, convened upon extraordinary occasions? This is the account which every christian easily gives himself of it, and which, therefore, it would be needless to enlarge upon. I shall only take notice on this head, that praise and thanksgiving do, in strictness of speech, signify things somewhat different. Our praise properly terminates in God, on the account of his natural excellencies and perfections, and is that act of devotion by which we confess and admire his several attributes; but thanksgiving is a narrower duty, and imports only a grateful sense and acknowledgment of past mercies. We praise God for all his glorious

glorious acts, of every kind, that regard either us or other men; for his very vengeance, and those judgments which he sometimes sends abroad in the earth; but we thank him (properly speaking) for the instances of his goodness alone, and for such only of these as we ourselves are someway concerned in. This, I say, is what the two words strictly imply: but since the language of scripture is generally less exact, and useth either of them often to express the other by, I shall not think myself obliged, in what follows, thus nicely always to distinguish them.

Now the great reasonableness of this duty of praise or thanksgiving, and our several obligations to it, will appear, if we either consider it absolutely in itself as the debt of our natures, or compare it with other duties, and shew the rank it bears among them; or set out, in the last place, some of its peculiar properties and advantages with regard to the devout performer of it.

I. The duty of praise and thanksgiving, considered absolutely in itself, is, I say, the debt and law of our nature. We had such faculties bestowed on us by our creator, as made us capable of satisfying this debt, and obeying this law; and they never, therefore, work more naturally and freely than when they are thus employed.

It is one of the earliest instructions given us by philosophy, and which hath ever since been approved and inculcated by the wisest men of all ages, that the original design of making man was, that he might praise and honour him who made him. When God had finished this goodly frame of things we call the world, and put together the several parts of it, according to his infinite wisdom, in exact number, weight, and measure, there was still wanting a creature in these lower regions that could apprehend the beauty, order, and exquisite contrivance of it; that from contemplating the gift, might be able to raise itself up to the great giver, and do honour to all his attributes. Every thing, indeed, that God made, did, in some sense, glorify its author, inasmuch as it carried upon it the plain mark and impress of the deity, and was an effect worthy of that first cause from whence it flowed; and thus might the heavens be

said, at the first moment in which they stood forth, *to declare his glory, and the firmament to shew his handy-work.* Psalm xix. 1. But this was an imperfect and defective glory; the sign was of no signification here below, whilst there was no one here as yet to take notice of it. Man, therefore, was formed to supply this want, endued with powers fit to find out and to acknowledge these unlimited perfections, and then put into this temple of God, this lower world, as the priest of nature, to offer up the incense of thanks and praise for the mute and the insensible part of the creation.

This, I say, hath been the opinion all along of the most thoughtful men, down from the most ancient times: and though it be not demonstrative, yet is it what we cannot but judge highly reasonable, if we do but allow, that man was made for some end or other, and that he is capable of perceiving that end: for then, let us search and inquire never so much, we shall find no other account of him that we can rest upon so well. If we say, that he was made purely for the good pleasure of God; this is, in effect, to say, that he was made for no determinate end; or for none, at least, that we can discern. If we say, that he was designed as an instance of the wisdom, and power, and goodness of God, this indeed may be the reason of his being in general; for it is the common reason of the being of every thing besides. But it gives no account why he was made such a being as he is, a reflecting, thoughtful, inquisitive being: the particular reason of this seems most aptly to be drawn from the praise and honour that was (not only to redound to God from him, but) to be given to God by him.

This duty, therefore, is the debt and law of our nature. And it will more distinctly appear to be such, if we consider the two ruling faculties of our mind (the understanding, and the will) apart, in both which it is deeply founded: in the understanding, as in the principle of reason, which owns and acknowledges it; in the will, as in the fountain of gratitude and return, which prompts, and even constrains us to pay it.

Reason was given us as a rule and measure, by the help of which we were

to proportion our esteem of every thing, according to the degrees of perfection and goodness which we found therein. It cannot therefore, if it doth its office at all, but apprehend God as the best and most perfect being : it must needs see, and own, and admire his infinite perfections ; and this is what is strictly meant by praise, which, therefore, is expressed in scripture by confessing to God, and acknowledging him ; by ascribing to him what is his due ; and, as far as this sense of the word reaches, it is impossible to think of God without praising him. For it depends not on the understanding how it shall apprehend things, any more than it doth on the eye, how visible objects shall appear to it.

The duty takes a farther and surer hold of us by the means of our will, and that strong bent towards gratitude which the author of our nature hath implanted in it. There is not a more active principle than this in the mind of man ; and surely that which deserves its utmost force, and should set all its springs awork, is God, the great and universal benefactor, from whom alone we received whatever we either have or are, and to whom we can possibly repay nothing but our praises, or (to speak more properly on this head, and according to the strict import of the word) our thanksgivings. *Who hath first given to God (saith the great apostle, in his usual figure), and it shall be recompensed unto him again ?* Rom. xi. 35, 36. A gift, it seems, always requires a recompence : nay, but *of him, and through him, and to him are all things*. Of him, as the author ; through him, as the preserver and governor ; to him, as the end and perfection of all things, *To whom, therefore (as it follows), be glory for ever, Amen !*

Gratitude consists in an equal return of benefits, if we are able ; or of thanks, if we are not : which thanks, therefore, must rise always in proportion as the favours received are great, and the receiver incapable of making any other sort of requital. Now, since no man hath benefited God at any time, and yet every man, in each moment of his life, is continually benefited by him, what strong obligations must we needs be under to thank him ? It is true, our thanks are really as insignificant to him as any

other kind of return would be : in themselves, indeed, they are worthless, but his goodness hath put a value upon them. He hath declared, he will accept them in lieu of the vast debt we owe ; and, after that, which is fittest for us, to dispute how they come to be taken as an equivalent, or to pay them ?

It is, therefore, the voice of nature (as far as gratitude itself is so), that the good things we receive from above should be sent back again thither in thanks and praises, *As the rivers run into the sea ; to the place (the ocean of beneficence) from whence the rivers come, thither should they return again.* Eccles. i. 7.

II. We have considered the duty absolutely : we are now to compare it with others, and to see what rank it bears among them. And here we shall find, that among all the acts of religion immediately addressed to God, this is much the noblest and most excellent, as it must needs be, if what hath been laid down be allowed, that the end of man's creation was, to praise and glorify God : for that cannot but be the most noble and excellent act of any being, which best answers the end and design of it. Other parts of devotion, such as confession and prayer, seem not originally to have been designed for man, nor man for them. They imply guilt and want, with which the state of innocence was not acquainted. Had man continued in that estate, his worship (like the devotions of angels) had been paid to heaven in pure acts of thanksgiving ; and nothing had been left for him to do, beyond the enjoying the good things of life, as nature directed, and praising the God of nature who bestowed them. But being fallen from innocence and abundance, having contracted guilt, and forfeited his right to all sorts of mercies, prayer and confession became necessary for a time to retrieve the loss, and restore him to that state wherein he should be able to live without them : these are fitted, therefore, for a lower dispensation, before which, in paradise, there was nothing but praise, and after which there shall be nothing but that in heaven. Our perfect state did at first, and will at last, consist in the performance of this duty ; and herein, therefore, lies the excellence and the honour of our nature.

It is the same way of reasoning, by which the apostle hath given the preference to charity beyond faith and hope, and every spiritual gift. *Charity never faileth* (1 Cor. xiii. 8.), saith he; meaning, that it is not a virtue useful only in this life, but will accompany us also into the next. *But whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away:* These are gifts of a temporary advantage, and shall all perish in the using; *for we know in part, and we prophesy in part,* ver. 9. Our present state is imperfect; and therefore, what belongs to that, and only that, must be imperfect too. *But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away,* ver. 10. The argument of St. Paul, we see, which sets charity above the rest of christian graces, will give praise also the pre-eminence over all other parts of christian worship; and we may conclude our reasoning, therefore, as he doth his: And now abideth confession, prayer, and praise, these three; but the greatest of these is praise.

It is so certainly on other accounts as well as this; particularly as it is the most disinterested branch of our religious service; such as hath the most of God, and the least of ourselves in it, of any we pay; and therefore approaches the nearest of any to a pure, and free, and perfect act of homage. For though a good action doth not grow immediately worthless by being done with the prospect of advantage, as some have strangely imagined; yet it will be allowed, I suppose, that its being done without the mixture of that end, or with as little of it as is possible, recommends it so much the more, and raises the price of it. *Doth Job fear God for nought?* (Job, i. 9.) was an objection of Satan; which implied, that those duties were most valuable where our own interest was least aimed at: and God seems, by the commission he then gave Satan, to try experiments upon Job, thus far to have allowed his plea. Now our requests for future, and even our acknowledgments of past mercies, centre purely in ourselves; our own interest is the direct aim of them. But praise is a generous and unmercenary principle, which proposes no other end to itself but to do, as is fit for a creature endowed with

such faculties to do, towards the most perfect and beneficent of beings, and to pay the willing tribute of honour there, where the voice of reason directs us to pay it. God hath indeed annexed a blessing to the duty; and when we know this we cannot chuse while we are performing the duty, but have some regard to the blessing which belongs to it. However, that is not the direct aim of our devotions, nor was it the first motive that stirred us up to them. Had it been so, we should naturally have betaken ourselves to prayer, and breathed out our desires in that form wherein they are most properly conveyed.

In short, praise is our most excellent work, a work common to the church triumphant and militant, and which lifts us up into a communion and fellowship with angels. The matter, about which it is conversant, is always the perfections of God's nature, and the act itself is the perfection of ours.

III. I come now, in the last place, to set out some of its peculiar properties and advantages, which recommend it to the devout performer. And,

1st, It is the most pleasing part of our devotions. It proceeds always from a lively cheerful temper of mind; and it cherishes and improves what it proceeds from: *for it is good to sing praises unto our God* (says one whose experience in this case we may rely upon); *for it is pleasant, and praise is comely.* Psal. cxlvii. 1. Petition and confession are the language of the indigent and the guilty, the breathings of a sad and a contrite spirit: *Is any afflicted? let him pray: but, is any merry? let him sing psalms.* James, v. 13. The most usual and natural way of men's expressing the mirth of their hearts, is in a song, and songs are the very language of praise; to the expressing of which they are in a peculiar manner appropriated, and are scarce of any other use in religion. Indeed, the whole composition of this duty is such as throughout speaks ease and delight to the mind. It proceeds from love, and from thankfulness; from love, the fountain of pleasure, the passion which gives every thing we do or enjoy its relish and agreeableness: from thankfulness, which involves in it the memory of past benefits, the actual presence of them to the mind, and the repeated enjoyment of them. And as its prin-

ciple is, such is its end also; for it procureth quiet and ease to the mind, by doing somewhat towards satisfying that debt which it labours under; by delivering it of those thoughts of praise and gratitude, those exultations it is so full of, and which would grow uneasy and troublesome to it if they were kept in. If the thankful refrained, it would be pain and grief to them: but then, then is their *soul satisfied as with marrow and fatness, when their mouth praiseth God with joyful lips.* Psalm lxxiii. 5.

2d, It is another distinguishing property of divine praise, that it enlargeth the powers and capacities of our souls, turning them from little and low things, upon their greatest and noblest object, the divine nature, and employing them in the discovery and admiration of those several perfections that adorn it. We see what difference there is between man and man; such as there is hardly greater between man and beast: and this proceeds chiefly from the different sphere of thought which they act in, and the different objects they converse with. The mind is essentially the same in the peasant and the prince; the forces of it naturally equal in the untaught man and the philosopher; only the one of these is busied in mean affairs, and within narrower bounds; the other exercises himself in things of weight and moment; and this it is that puts the wide distance between them. Noble objects are to the mind what the sun-beams are to a bud or flower: they open and unfold, as it were, the leaves of it, put it upon exerting and spreading itself every way, and call forth all those powers that lie hid and locked up in it. The praise and admiration of God, therefore, brings this advantage along with it, that it sets our faculties upon their full stretch, and improves them to all the degrees of perfection of which they are capable.

3d, It farther promotes in us an exquisite sense of God's honour, and an high indignation of mind at every thing that openly profanes it. For what we value and delight in, we cannot with patience bear slighted or abused. Our own praises, which we are constantly putting up, will be a spur to us toward procuring and promoting the divine glory in every other instance, and will make us set our faces against all open and avowed im-

peties; which, methinks, should be considered a little by such as would be thought not to be wanting in this duty, and yet are often silent under the foulest dishonours done to religion, and its great Author: for, tamely to hear God's name and worship vilified by others, is no very good argument that we have been used to honour and reverence him in good earnest ourselves.

4th, It will, beyond all this, work in us a deep humility, and consciousness of our own imperfections. Upon a frequent attention to God and his attributes, we shall easily discover our own weakness and emptiness; our swelling thoughts of ourselves will abate, and we shall see and feel, that we are *altogether lighter, to be laid in the balance, than vanity.* Psalm lxi. And this is a lesson, which, to the greatest part of mankind, is I think very well worth learning. We are naturally presumptuous and vain, full of ourselves, and regardless of every thing besides; especially when some little outward privileges distinguish us from the rest of mankind; then it is odds, but we look into ourselves with great degrees of complacency, and are *wiser* (and better every way) *in our own conceit than seven men, that can render a reason.* Now, nothing will contribute so much to the cure of this vanity as a due attention to God's excellencies and perfections. By comparing these with those which we imagine belong to us, we shall learn *not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think of ourselves, but to think soberly* (Rom. xii. 3.); we shall find more satisfaction in looking upwards, and humbling ourselves before our common Creator, than in casting our eyes downwards with scorn upon our fellow-creatures, and setting at nought any part of the work of his hands. The vast distance we are at from real and infinite worth will astonish us so much, that we shall not be tempted to value ourselves upon those lesser degrees of pre-eminence, which custom or opinion, or some little accidental advantages, have given us over other men.

5th, I shall mention but one use of it more, and it is this; that a conscientious praise of God will keep us back from all false and mean praises, all fulsome and servile flatteries, such as are in use among men. Praising, as it is commonly managed,

naged, is nothing else but a trial of skill upon a man, how many good things we can possibly say of him. All the treasures of oratory are ransacked; all the fine things that ever were said are heaped together for his sake; and no matter whether it belongs to him or not, so there be but enough of it; which is one deplorable instance, among a thousand, of the baseness of human nature, its small regard to truth and justice, to right or wrong, to what is or is not to be praised. But he who hath a deep sense of the excellencies of God upon his heart, will make a God of nothing besides. He will give every one his just encomium, honour where honour is due, and as much as is due, because it is his duty to do so; but the honour of God will suffer him to go no farther: which rule, if it had been observed, a neighbouring prince (who now, God be thanked, needs flattery somewhat more than ever he did) would have wanted a great deal of that incense which hath been offered up to him by his adorers.

Upon these grounds doth the duty of praise stand, and these are the obligations that bind us to the performance of it. It is the end of our being, and the very rule and law of our nature, flowing from the two great fountains of human action, the understanding and the will, naturally, and almost necessarily. It is the most excellent part of our religious worship, enduring to eternity after the rest shall be done away, and paid even now, in the frankest manner, with the least regard to our own interest. It recommends itself to us by several peculiar properties and advantages; as it carries more pleasure in it than all other kinds of devotion; as it enlarges and exalts the several powers of the mind; as it breeds in us an exquisite sense of God's honour, and a willingness to promote it in the world; as it teaches us to be humble and lowly ourselves; and yet preserves us from base and sordid flattery, from bestowing mean and undue praises upon others.

IV. I shall now shut up the arguing part of this discourse, with a short application to two sorts of persons, the careless and the profane; one of which neglects the practice of so important a duty, the other lives in an open defiance of it.

A neglect, in this case, doth certainly

involve in it a very high degree of guilt and folly; for it is, we see, the neglect of our duty and honour, our interest and our pleasure, all at once. It is to omit doing that which we were purposely sent into the world to do; and without doing which, all the other affairs of life are but one continued impertinence: that which we have so many obligations to do, and no excuse for leaving undone, since praise is within every man's reach, there is no one but hath it in his power to be thankful.

God commanded the Jews to acknowledge his sovereignty and beneficence by sacrifices; a costly and a troublesome way of worship. Of us he requires only the cheap and easy offering of our thanks and praises; and shall we not pay it? Alas! we do not! Every thing proves an hindrance to us in the way to this our bounden duty and service: we are too idle, or too busy to attend upon it. And even when we find leisure enough, yet how cold and how insensible are we whilst it is going forward! *We draw nigh unto him with our mouths, and honour him with our lips* (perhaps); *but our hearts are far from him.* Matth. xv. 8. And do we then know what it is to praise God becomingly? Do we remember how the great teacher of thanksgiving summons up every one of his faculties to assist him in it? *Bless the Lord, O my soul! and all that is within me, bless his holy Name!* Psalm ciii. 1. It is a work that will employ *all that is within us*; will call for all the application, and vigour, and warmth that we can possibly bestow upon it. Cold and languid praise is no praise; this sacrifice can be no longer acceptable than it is burning.

To those men who live in the contempt of this duty, we have also somewhat to say, if they would but hear us. They are generally such as pretend a high sense of the dignity of human nature, and bear no small respect to their own understandings. Now, though other parts of religious worship should happen to be too mean and low for such great minds to take up with; yet this, methinks, might deserve to be thought equal to them. Let confession and prayer go on only for the arts of whining and begging, and be as much beneath them as they imagine; yet, surely, praise hath somewhat in it so great and so noble, as may

invite them to practise it. It is a subject fit for the most enlarged capacities to dwell on; and such an one, as even those would certainly find themselves raised and improved by.

If it were possible for these men to have a relish of any thing in this kind, we would desire them to make the trial; to take the hymn called *Te Deum* into their hands, and to read it attentively; and then tell us truly, whether they did not find their minds filled, and their affections strangely raised by the images which there occurred to them; whether they did not perceive themselves to be somewhat above themselves, whilst they were perusing it. And these effects, of which every man who joins in that hymn must be sensible, are owing to that majestic plainness and simplicity of thought which goes through it, unadorned by words, unenlivened by figures. It is the matter alone which supports the expression. And because the matter therein contained is the excellencies of the divine nature, the pure and genuine objects of praise; therefore is the hymn itself so lofty and moving.

But, alas! we speak in vain. The men who are bold enough to slight a duty of this rank and character, will easily slight every thing that can be offered to bring them to it. All we can say to them is, that as God made them for his glory, so he will certainly serve the ends of that glory upon them one way or another. And therefore, if they will not freely praise him for his goodness in this world, they shall surely, whether they will or no, contribute to the praise of his justice in the next.

To him, with the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour, praise and glory henceforth, and for evermore. Amen.

S E R M O N VIII.

A Scornor incapable of true Wisdom.

PROV. xiv. 6.

A scornor seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not.

IT is the wisest among the children of men who speaks, and about that which most nearly concerns us; and he best understood even the method of attaining true wisdom: it becomes us, therefore,

to give the most fixed and serious attention we can to what he is saying.

A scornor, saith he, seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not. Where we are, first, to inquire, who it is that is represented to us under the character of a scornor; and then, in what sense he is said to seek wisdom, but not to find it.

The scornor is one who is frequently mentioned in this book of Proverbs, and against whom the author of it hath levelled no small number of his apophthegms and wise sayings. We find in the Psalms, and prophetic writings also, many glances at him, many complaints of him: so that the nation of the Jews did, it seems, abound mightily with this sort of men; and they were a great and particular grievance to the followers of true piety and wisdom.

Their character seems, in short, to have been this: They were men that with much ado had made a shift to get rid of good principles, and such stiff opinions as they found inconsistent with a loose practice. As they had not any religion themselves, so their way was to despise those who had; to look down with pity and contempt upon a poor deluded under-world; beasts of burthen that followed in a track after their leaders, slaves to received rules and precarious opinions, to foolish, empty forms and observances, but who never once reasoned freely, or thought for themselves. They were unfortunately fallen into a time when frequent commotions happened in the Jewish state (as the case remarkably was, in the age before Solomon came to the throne), and had seen several sorts of men uppermost, and, consequently, several notions of things prevailing by turns. This contributed mightily to unsettle their thoughts, or (as they called it doubtless) to enlarge them; to create in them a slight opinion of the eternal differences of right and wrong, good and evil; and to make them laugh at those who were eager on any side, or for any cause whatsoever, which they did not get by.

They evidently saw that some, who set up for greater purity, and a demurer shew and face of religion than their neighbours, were really counterfeits, and meant nothing at the bottom but their own interest; and they wisely resolved upon this, that all religion was like theirs,

theirs, a convenient trick and pretence only, invented by cunning men to keep silly people in awe, to make princes reign safely, and the priesthood live easily. But as for them, they knew better things than to fall in with the herd, and to give themselves up to be ridden by the tribe of Levi, the poorest and most contemptible tribe of the twelve, which had no lot, no inheritance among their brethren, but lived upon the cheat of sacrifices and offerings, and upon driving a gainful traffick for the good things of this world, here paid down to them, by promising and preaching up to those they dealt with a recompence in a world to come.

Nor were these men content to enjoy this secret, which they had thus found out, quietly among themselves, but set up openly for proselytes, and a party, for running down all religion, and for laughing piety and virtue out of countenance: so that a good and honest man was sure to be their mark, wheresoever they found him, and they were ever shooting their arrows against him, even bitter words. Psalm lxxiv. 3. And this was come to that pass, that the true servants of God did almost sink under the affliction, and did make it matter of public request to God, in the solemn service of the church, to be freed from it:—*Have mercy upon us, O Lord, said they, have mercy upon us, for we are exceedingly filled with contempt. Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud.* Psalm cxxiii. 3, 4.

This is, in some measure, the character of that man, who, in the language of the text, is called a *scorner*; and you see now in what sense he is said to seek wisdom, but not to find it. For the meaning of these expressions is plainly this, that he pretends to know more, and to see farther, than the rest of mankind; to have made freer inquiries after truth, and to have shaken off the prejudices of education more thoroughly. He sets up for examining things to the bottom, without taking them upon trust, or relying on the authority of any man. What God is pretended to have said in the holy writings, what wise and good men have said in all ages and countries of the world, he is not much concerned to know. To the oracles of right rea-

son he goes (by right reason always meaning his own), and from thence he inquires what he is to think and to do; raises some fanciful scheme of things to himself, frames some particular set of opinions, and then rejoices in the mighty discovery he hath made, and wonders at the rest of the world that they do not fall in with it, and adore it. Now these pretences, the wise man tells us, are vain, and these searches are vain. He hath taken a great deal of pains, only to be out of the way, and to miss the mark which he aims at: *A scorner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not.*

Having thus largely opened the sense of the text, I shall endeavour, in what follows, to justify the truth of the observation contained in it, by shewing you how it comes to pass that the men, who thus set up for a more than ordinary pitch of wisdom and sense, by contemning religion, and deriding the professors of it, do always, and must always, fail of the end which they propose to themselves, since whatever abilities they may have in other matters, yet they are the most unqualified and incapable of all men to make impartial inquiries after divine truth, and to discern between that and error.

There are four things which particularly unfit a man for such a task, a very proud or a very suspicious temper, false wit or sensuality; and these are the chief and prevailing ingredients in the composition of that man whom we call a scorner. The two last do generally, and in most instances, belong to him: but the two first are essential to him, and inseparable from him.

Pride is that ruling quality which, of all others, seems to take the fastest hold of him: *Proud and haughty scorner is his name* (Prov. xxi. 24.), says Solomon, elsewhere.—And again, *There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes, and their eye-lids lifted up!* Prov. xxx, 13. The truth is, there never was, nor ever can be, a settled contempt of religious principles, that is not built upon pride: i. e. upon an undue value which a man hath for himself, and for his own opinion, and a disregard for every thing besides; and, therefore, the author of (that fantastical book) the *Leviathan* doth, at the very entrance of it, very honestly, and in terms confess, that he is a man who

who loves his own opinions : and so doubtless doth every man too who treads in his steps, though he doth not own it so frankly, or perhaps know it so thoroughly. Indeed a modest, humble man can hardly bring himself once to think of shaking off common received principles, and going against the united wisdom of mankind ; or, if he should entertain, yet will he never venture to publish that thought, but will conceal it as carefully as he would his own bosom infirmity, or the secret of his friend. It is the presumptuous and proud man alone who dares to trample on those truths which the rest of the world reverence, and can sit down quietly in the assurance, that he alone is in the right, and all mankind beside in the wrong.

Now, I say, as there is no one quality that sticks more closely to a scorner than that of pride, so is there none that doth more evidently obstruct right reasoning, and an impartial search after truths of all kinds, especially those which relate to virtue and piety. And no wonder therefore, if, on this account, the scorner, though he seek wisdom, yet findeth it not. Pride makes a man seem sufficient, in his own eyes, for all manner of speculations and inquiries, and therefore puts him indifferently upon the pursuit of all knowledge, and the determination of all doubts, without giving him leave to distrust himself in the least, or once to consider which way his genius and abilities lie. Hence it happens, that the man not being duly qualified for every search, or, if he were, yet not having leisure and opportunity enough to go through with it, is fain to take up with slight and superficial accounts of things ; and then, what he wants in true knowledge, to make up in downright assurance. As soon as he hath touched on any science or study, he immediately seems to himself to have mastered it ; is as positive in his opinions, and as hardy in his assertions, as if the thoughts of his whole life had been directed that way only : which is as if a coaster, who had gone from port to port only, should pretend to give a better description of the inland parts of a country, than those who have travelled it all over. But this, I say, is the mischievous nature of pride ; it makes a man grasp at every thing, and, by consequence, comprehend

nothing effectually and thoroughly, and yet (which is worst of all) inclines him to despise and contradict those that do. It gives him just enough understanding to raise an objection or a doubt, but not enough to lay it ; which, as it is the meanest and most despicable, so it is also the most dangerous state of mind a man can be in ; and by so much the more dangerous, as the subject upon which his inquiries turn is more important, and the errors more fatal which he runs into, for want of a due knowledge of it. He that is but half a philosopher is in danger of being an atheist ; an half-physician is apt to turn empiric ; an half-bred man is conceited in his address, and troublesome in his conversation. Thus it is in all matters of speculation or practice, he that knows but a little of them, and is very confident of his own strength, is more out of the way of true knowledge than if he knew nothing at all. Now there is, I say, a natural tendency in pride towards putting a man's mind into such a situation as this, and therefore it must needs be a quality very opposite to the search and attainment of true wisdom.

And then, supposing a proud man to be once in the wrong, it is scarce possible that he should ever be set right again ; he is placed above the reach of that great means of amendment, reproof : *A scorner heareth not rebuke* (Prov. xiii. 1.), says Solomon ; and therefore, as his pride led him into a mistake at first, so will it be sure to keep him there, and to harden him in his way against whatever wise men can think or say of him.

Thus, I say, is pride an enemy to the knowledge of truth in general, but most of all doth it hinder men from discerning sacred truth, and the doctrines of revealed religion. A proud man is very hardly brought to digest the humble duties of the cross, or to admit a belief of the mysteries of christianity : the one are too low for him, and he cannot stoop to the practice of them ; the other are too high for his understanding, and he desires to be excused from entertaining any proposition as true, which he doth not perfectly comprehend. If he cannot give himself a certain plain account in what manner, and to what end God did a thing, he wisely resolves, that
therefore

therefore he did it not at all. If he hath not as clear an idea of every term in an article of faith, as he hath of those in a mathematical proposition, it is presently unphilosophical, absurd, and foolish; invented by those whose interest it is to puzzle men's understandings, that they may have their wills and affections at their service.

II. And this puts us in mind also of that second great ingredient in the character of a scorner, which we proposed to consider: a strange and unreasonable degree of *suspicion*, by which he doubts of every thing he hears, and distrusts every man he converses with; imagines the world to be all cheat and imposture; that there is no sincerity, no honesty any where, but that every man is continually studying how to put a trick upon his neighbour. Without this temper (it might be easily proved that) a man cannot bring himself to run down religion, and the professors of it; and with it, it is impossible, I think, to arrive at true wisdom. Indeed, to be cautious and upon our guard in receiving doctrines, and not easily to give up our assent to every tale that is told us, is a point of great prudence, and very requisite in such a multiplicity of opinions as there is in the world, to preserve us from error. But then we may carry this point too far, we may be so scrupulous and circumspect in admitting the testimonies of men, as to reject some good witnesses among several bad ones; and to deceive ourselves oftentimes, for very fear of being deceived by others. A general undistinguishing suspicion is altogether as apt to mislead a man, as a too easy and unwary credulity; and to this excess a scorner is naturally inclined. He is so possessed with the notion of priestcraft and pious frauds, as to apply it indifferently to all religions, and to every thing in religion. He is so afraid of having his understanding imposed upon in matters of faith, that he stands equally aloof from all propositions of that kind, whether true or false: which is, as if a man should refuse to receive any money at all, because there is a great deal goes about that is false and counterfeit; or resolve not to make a friendship or acquaintance with any man, because many men are not to be trusted. Certainly this is a very great instance of

folly, and in what breast soever it harbours, cannot but indispose a man extremely for the study and attainment of religious wisdom. An extremity of suspicion in an inquirer after truth, is like a raging jealousy in an husband or a friend; it leads a man to turn all his thoughts toward the ill-natured side, and to put the worst construction upon every thing; and (in consequence of that) for once that he is really in the right in his guesses and censures, to be very often and very much in the wrong.

III. A third part of the character of that man whom we are describing is *false wit*, or a way of exposing things sacred and serious, by passing a bold jest upon them, and ridiculing arguments instead of confuting them. The very name of a scorner will tell us, that this is one of his most beloved accomplishments; and I am sure it is such an one as can never help a man to procure right impressions of things, and will scarce ever allow him to improve or preserve them. Wit indeed, as it implies a certain uncommon reach and vivacity of thought, is an excellent talent, very fit to be employed in the search of truth, and very capable of assisting us to discern and embrace it; but in the way in which the scorner exerts it, the way of satire and prophane drollery, it betrays a man into a thousand errors for one that it discovers to him. Men of quick and lively parts are apt to give themselves a loose beyond plain reason and common sense, and to say many things not exactly right and true, in order to say somewhat new and surprising. Their great aim is, in general, to please, and, in order to it, they must bend all their wit that way to which the corrupt nature of man is inclined, and be sure always to speak against that which is uppermost: I mean the opinions that are most general and prevailing. This gives them a light and trifling, instead of a serious and manly frame of spirit; and makes them think they have answered all the wisest reasons that can be brought for any thing, if they have but clapped a nickname upon it, and dressed up a grave and venerable truth in so odd a disguise as to raise mirth and laughter from it. Thus a late person, eminent for wit and wickedness, till a death-bed made him more serious, and gave him truer apprehensions of things,

things, used to please himself mightily with this thought, that the doing of a miracle was only another phrase for the shewing of a trick; and having once represented the thing to himself under such a light image, he could hardly be brought to think reverently of it ever afterwards, or to allow the strongest arguments which could be brought for the truth of miracles a due and impartial consideration. And thus also the great leader of the libertines of this age (whom we have already had occasion to mention) made sport with the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, by translating, after an absurd manner, the Greek word *ἀόρατος* (which St. John applies to him), and assuring us, that that appellation given to our Saviour was, in our tongue, as much as to say, the verb of God; and this vain and blasphemous criticism he thought sufficient to overthrow a prime article of the christian faith. In the same manner he pretended to ridicule the doctrine of grace, by inquiring into the meaning of two words, generally used by divines concerning it, to wit, infusion and inspiration; and by informing us that they signified, in plain English, inpouring and inblowing. I bring these instances to shew how far a scorner may be led out of the way of truth, by a little knack of playing upon things and words, which he miscalls *wit*, and upon which he shall value himself more, and be wiser in his own conceit, than *seven men that can render a reason*.

IV. The fourth and last thing, from whence we proposed to give an account of his deceptions, was *sensuality*: and whether this too doth not, for the most part, accompany a contempt of religion, I appeal to the observation and experience of every one that hears me. Look round the world, and you shall seldom find a man loose in his principles, who is not so likewise in manners. There may possibly be, now and then, in an age, an instance of some cold phlegmatic man, that shall set up for overturning religion and morality, merely for the sake of contradiction, or to get himself a name by it, without the design of indulging his own appetites in so doing: but this is a very rare case; generally the scornors are, as St. Peter and St. Jude have, in their several epistles,

agreed to describe them, *Men who walk after their own lusts*. 2 Pet. iii. 3.; Jude, 13. Accordingly we may observe, that this scorning humour hath been most prevalent in those ages of the world in which the love of pleasure, and the arts of ease and luxury, did most abound, and is commonly incident to men at that time of their lives when their lusts are most ungoverned, and their blood boils hottest. It is chiefly the young robust sinner that indulges himself in it, whilst he is in the midst of his enjoyments; for though a man may continue in the practice of this impious folly to the very end of his life, yet the habit itself is generally formed much earlier.

Now the sensual man is, of all men living, the most improper for inquiries after truth, and the least at leisure for it. He is never sedate and cool, and therefore not able to fix his attention to a point, and go through with it. He is never disinterested and impartial, and therefore not capable of deliberating freely. He is already under the dominion and power of his own lusts, and perhaps likes to be so, and is very unwilling to shake off his chains. Now such a man, so qualified, is, no doubt, a very incompetent judge of divine truth, and very unfit to consider the pleas that are brought for it. His search into these things is like to be with no great evenness and fairness: how can it, when he comes with strong wishes that he may find it all a mistake? Indeed, when a man allows himself in all sorts of impurities, and is determined to go on in them, and yet finds himself under the troublesome restraint of principles, and the dread of religion, which hangs continually over him, the only way for him to pursue his enjoyments, and yet be easy, is, to set his face directly against the doctrines of religion that give him any check or disturbance, and resolve to get rid of them as soon as he can. And he may put the thoughts which arise in him upon this occasion together, and make a book of them, if he pleases, and then tell us, that this is a sober inquiry after truth, and a free discussion of the point in debate; but there is nothing of that in it. He thinks of truth just as a man doth of his enemy, with spite and anger, and a design only of finding out whatever may blast and

and expose it. This is a strange com-
melious way of treating divine things,
and would tempt even a good man to
return the affronts done to virtue and
piety, by opening the characters of those
who do them; in which we should com-
monly find, that sensuality and looseness
of life had a very great and particular
share. But some men, who write pre-
tended histories of religion, are beholden
to the real religion of others, that their
histories are not written.

Thus have I run through those four
several properties, which remarkably be-
long to the character of a *scorner*; and
shewn you, how each of them contri-
butes to misinform and mislead him in
his pursuit of wisdom, so that, supposing
him really and in good earnest to seek
it, yet, thus setting out, and thus qua-
lified, it is not at all probable that he
should find it.

And now the plain and obvious use
we are to make of this discourse is, to
satisfy ourselves from hence, how it hath
come to pass, that the true religion, all
along, in the several ages of the world,
hath not been entertained by many of
the seemingly wittiest and wisest among
the children of men. To this startling
question we can now give a short and
easy answer, from the observation of the
text, *they were scorers*. They were
either proud and opinionative men, that
could not endure to learn plain humble
lessons of piety and goodness, especially
from such as they had no esteem of, no
value for: or their minds were taint-
ed with an ill-natured and unreasonable
suspicion, which, from finding out some
cheats in religion, led them to pro-
nounce all religion a cheat. They had
a talent, perhaps, at ridiculing honest
rules and maxims, and making sport
with things sacred and serious; and, there-
fore, to have owned any fixed scheme of
religious principles, would have been a
mighty damp to their imaginations, and
have taken away from them the subject
of above half their wit and pleasantness.
Or, lastly, they were men of sensual and
impure lives, who were resolved to make
their opinions and their pleasures as con-
sistent as they could; and who therefore
were obliged, in point of interest, to dis-
believe every thing that made against
them.

This is the short and true account of

the matter; and will appear to be so, if
we cast our eyes backward on the story of
the world, and consider who they have
been that have rejected the true religion,
all along from the creation down to this
time.

In the old world, Noah, who was the
only man that preserved the worship of
the true God in his family, seems to have
been an honest plain-hearted man; *just
and perfect in his generation* (as he is de-
scribed in scripture), *and walking with
God*. Gen. vi. 9. The rest of the world
are said to have eaten and drunken, to
have married and been given in mar-
riage, *i. e.* they were men who lived in
all the enjoyments of sense, who revelled,
and took their fill of all the good things
of this world, and, to be sure, were very
merry and very bitter upon those that
did not. How did they deride that grave
preacher of righteousness, and his pre-
cise family, when he and his sons talked
to them of righteousness, temperance, and
judgment; especially when he told them
that there was such a flood coming, and
that he was building that ark to preserve
himself and his household, what a jest
was he to the men of parts and pleasure!
How many scornful and gay things were
said upon this occasion, while the work
went forward by those who thought them-
selves very wise, and him very foolish;
but the fountains of the great deep were
broken up, and the windows of heaven
opened; and then they began to change
their opinions, when, alas! it was too
late to learn.

In the next great period after the flood,
the true religion was confined to the
single nation of the Jews. And one may
think it strange at first sight, that, if it
were the true religion, it should be so con-
fined; that the wise and knowing part
of mankind should not discern the strength
of the evidence that was brought for the
divine original of the law of Moses, nor
receive the God of Israel for their God.
But if we consider a little farther, we
shall be satisfied, that the true reason of
men's infidelity, throughout this long pe-
riod of time, was a mean and contempt-
uous notion they had entertained of the
Jewish people, and of their rites and ce-
remonies. The wise men of the East, in
the earliest ages, and the philosophers of
the West in later times, had too high an
opinion of themselves, and too low an
one

one of that little narrow-souled superstitious nation, to submit themselves to be taught by them. The Jews were a proverb and a by-word to the rest of the world, the perpetual subject of their scorn and reproach. And who can think (may we suppose one of those wise heathens to have said) that truth should lie hid among such an odd sort of people, in such a little spot of the world?

And thus again, when christianity first appeared, it made no great progress among the disputers of this world, among the men of wit and subtlety, for this very reason; because they were scorers. The gospel was to the Jews (to the most learned and proud sect among the Jews the Pharisees) a *stumbling-block*, and to those of higher repute among the *Greeks*, *foolishness*, 1 Cor. i. 23. The great pretenders to knowledge every where unanimously condemned and derided it, as a poor and low system of principles; and could never once think of humbling their minds, to entertain the simplicity of the gospel.

How should the great lords of the earth, who swarm in all the delights of sense, and thought themselves born to enjoy them, submit to be talked out of their pleasures and their privileges by a few ignorant fishermen and tent-makers? The story of the propagation of the gospel in Jewry, might perhaps make a part of the conversation in the court of Tiberius; it was probably such a subject of discourse to them as the Quietists in Italy were to us, at their first appearing. The novelty of the thing might occasion some reflections and inquiries; but it was not to be expected, that men of pleasure and parts should give themselves the trouble of examining nicely into the pretensions with which this new religion set up, or of considering, in good earnest, whether they ought to become proselytes to it.

We are not to wonder, therefore, if, in some ages after christianity, we find not much said to the advantage of it, in the writings of those eminent Greeks and Romans, who are allowed to have been the best masters of polite thought and expression. Alas! Porphyry must have been contented to confess the vanity of philosophy, and Lucian must in great measure have foregone his skill in satire. The witty libertines of those times must have parted with much of the esteem they

had, and with most of their pleasures, if they had once admitted the truth of christianity; and, therefore, they agreed in running down the reputation of that, lest they should lose their own.

And as it was immediately after our Saviour's coming, so hath it been ever since, to this very day. The doctrines of the cross have never in any age met, nor will they ever in any future age meet with a kind and hearty reception among those who *fit in the seat of the scorers*.

But let us not therefore be dejected, because there are many whom the world esteems, who yet esteem not us, and our holy and undefiled religion. Neither let us suspect ourselves as being out of the way, and imposed upon, because men of a greater reach perhaps, and of a more improved understanding than we, are not of our mind. Solomon, who was certainly a man of understanding, and who was of our mind, doth, in a very few words (which I cannot repeat too often), afford us a full and comfortable solution of the case; a *scorer* (saith he) *seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not*.

From the account of former times it appears to us, that thus it always hath been; and from reflections on the nature of man, that thus it necessarily must be; and, therefore, let us possess our souls in patience and peace, and go on in the plain paths of godliness and honesty, without turning to the right or to the left, for whatever men scornfully witty can say of us, or to us.

Let us beg of him, *who scorneth the scorers, but giveth grace unto the lowly* (Prov. iii. 34.), let us beg of him to bestow on us, to preserve and increase in us that serious and humble frame of spirit, which alone can qualify us for a right apprehension of the truths and mysteries of the gospel; and which is, therefore, certainly preferable to all other endowments of mind, however the world may have misplaced the greatest part of its esteem upon them.

And let us, in order to this end, frequently take to ourselves the humble words of the son of Sirach, and say, *O Lord, Father and God of my life, give me not a proud look, but turn away from thy servant always an haughty mind. Turn away from me vain hopes and concupiscence, and thou shalt hold him up that is desirous always to serve thee. Let not the greediness of the belly, nor lust of the flesh take hold of*

me;

me; and give not over me thy servant to an impudent mind. Eccus, xxiii. 4, 5, 6.

And as for those who condemn us, and our narrow principles, and who make us their derision daily, let us (in the words of the apostle) *not cease to make mention of them in our prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto them the spirit of wisdom and revelation to the acknowledgment of him: the eyes of their understanding being enlightened, that they may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.* Eph. i. 16, 17, 18.

S E R M O N IX.

The Rule of doing as we would be done unto.

ST. MATTH. vii. 12.

All things, whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.

THE sentence I have read unto you is very fitly placed towards the close of our Saviour's admirable sermon on the mount; as being, in great measure, the epitome and sum of what the Divine Preacher had there expressed more at large. Nor is it less fitly ordered to be recited at the holy table, in the most solemn part of the service of this day; on which we meet annually to commemorate our deliverance from the attempts of those bloody and merciless men, who seem to have out-done all their predecessors and successors in wickedness, by a notorious contempt of this great evangelical rule, and of all the principles of common humanity. The practice of those conspirators was the perfect reverse of this precept; and we cannot, therefore, better be taught, or incited to detest the one, than by a due illustration and enforcement of the other. This I shall attempt, by offering to your thoughts some considerations, first, on the rule here laid down, *all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them*; and then, on the short but full encomium bestowed upon it, that it is *the law and the prophets*; which shall be followed by some inferences, naturally arising from the whole; and the general re-

flections advanced (though they may all along easily be understood to refer, yet) shall afterwards be particularly applied to the subject of this day's solemnity.

As to the rule itself, we may distinctly consider the just extent and bounds of it; the reason of its preferableness to all other rules, in point of evidence and conviction; the manifest equity and exactness; the peculiar properties and advantages of it.

All things, whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them; words of great force and energy, and yet the most simple, plain, and perspicuous that can be: and which, therefore, commentators do (as they too often do) obscure and perplex, by a pretence of explaining. The only possible doubt is concerning the extent of the matter contained in them; for it must be allowed, that there are many cases wherein we are by no means obliged to grant that to others, which we ourselves perhaps (were we in their circumstances, and they in ours) might be willing enough, unreasonably willing, to obtain from them. A benefactor is not bound to comply with the demands of such as ask unmerited favours, though conscious that he himself might be apt to make as extravagant requests, were it his turn to be the object of another man's beneficence. A magistrate is not at liberty, much less under any obligation, to turn the edge of justice from an importunate offender; because, if he himself were the criminal, he should certainly and equally desire to escape unpunished. The rule, therefore, which makes what we desire of other men, the measure of our dealing toward them, is to be understood not of vicious and excessive desires, but of such only as are fit and reasonable; such requests as we can, in our calmest thoughts, justify to ourselves; such as, we are sure, may be made without indecency, and cannot be refused without inhumanity. And, under this necessary limitation, the precept of the text may be thus understood: "Put thyself into such a man's condition, and consider what treatment, what favours, in that case thou mightest fairly and justly expect from him, and be thou sure to deal with him according to those thy just and regular expectations." And this I take to be the true explication of that other equivalent precept

cept given in the gospel, to *love our neighbours as ourselves*; which we may then in the most proper and strict sense of the words be said to do, when we first place ourselves in our neighbour's stead, and then learn to love him, by considering what degree of love and good-will of forbearance and forgiveness we might, under that change of circumstances, challenge from him.

It may be thought, that the rule, thus tempered and qualified, will not be of any special use or moment to us, in the direction of our practice, inasmuch as the lines of duty do not seem to be more clearly marked out, by this method of comparison, than they would have been by a direct injunction to us so to deal with others, as right reason and our consciences inform us that we ought to deal with them. For, after all, when we have made another man's case ours, we are still left to judge what, under such a change of circumstances, we might, in equity and reason, expect from him, before we can determine after what manner we are to behave ourselves towards him: and therefore, which way soever we take the measure of our duty to the bar of equity and reason, we must, it seems, in order to the fixing it, always finally appeal.

It is true, we must.—But the maxim of the text is that which, of all others, doth most effectually assist us towards making a free use of our reason, and forming right judgment of things on such occasions; for, by the means of it, we are able to consider our duty without prejudice, and to state the bounds of it impartially and fairly. When we determine amiss concerning the obligations incumbent upon us, in respect of other men, it is by reason of that strong weight of self-love which, like a bias, inclines and secretly sways our minds towards that side on which our own interest lies. To set this error right, we suppose ourselves to be the men who are to receive this treatment from others, which we are about to practise toward them; and then, the same selfish principle makes that appear very hard and unreasonable, which before it inclined us to approve; and thus our warped and perverted judgment, by being bent as much towards the opposite side, recovers its straightness. The rule of the text therefore is, at the bottom, a wise art of rebating one degree

of our partiality by another; it enables us to take two several views of our duty, to eye it in different situations, and under different lights; and, by that means, more distinctly and thoroughly to discern it. And, in this sense, *measuring ourselves by ourselves, and comparing ourselves with ourselves* (2 Cor. x. 12.), we take the surest way to be both just and wise.

There is nothing, we know, that gives a man so true and lively a sense of the sufferings of others, or restrains him so powerfully from doing unrighteous and oppressive things, as his having smarted formerly himself under the experience of them. Now, the supposing another man's ill usage to be ours, is the giving ourselves a present sense, as it were, a kind of feigned experience of it, which doth, for the time, serve all the purposes of a true one.

Upon these accounts it is that the precept of the text carries greater evidence, and a fuller degree of conviction in it, than any other rule of morality. Its apparent equity and reasonableness, is what we are next to consider; and this is so plain a point as not to want, or indeed be capable of, a solemn proof: for the precept manifestly aims at that which is the known foundation of equity and justice, in all matters of intercourse between man and man; the reducing things to one common standard, by the application of which they are all to be examined and tried. *Thou shalt not have in thy bag, or in thine house* (said the Levitical law), *divers weights, and divers measures; a great and a small* (i. e. one wherewith to buy, and another wherewith to sell): *but thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have.* Deut. xxv. 13, 14. What is said here of ordinary traffic and dealing, holds as true of the general commerce of human life, and that exchange of good offices by which society is upheld: there must be a perfect weight, and a just measure, by which all men are mutually obliged to regulate their conduct, in acting and suffering, in commanding and obeying, in giving and receiving; and this can be no other than the equal and righteous rule of the text, the *doing* in all cases, and to all persons, *even as we would be done unto*. There is no one so absurd and unreasonable, as not to see and acknowledge the absolute equity of this command

command in the theory, however he may swerve and decline from it in his practice; and to agree upon it as that golden mean, which, if universally observed, would make the world universally happy; every man a benefactor, a good angel, a deity, as it were, to his fellow-creatures; and earth the very image of heaven. I need, I can say no more concerning the reasonableness of this precept: however, it may help to excite and quicken your desires, and hopes of obeying it, if I proceed, as I proposed, to point out some distinguishing properties and advantages of it.

The first of which is, that it is alike easy and obvious to all understandings, to the meanest and most ignorant men, as well as to those of the greatest parts and improvements. God is, on this, as well as on other accounts, no respecter of persons, having made that which is most necessary most common, and, consequently, suited this principle, which all men have equal occasion to use, equally to the apprehensions of all men. They, therefore, who are incapable of long trains in deductions of reason; and of adapting the several rules of morality to the various circumstances of action, are yet able (as able as the acutest philosophers or casuists) to look into their own hearts, to ask themselves this plain question, and to return a clear answer to it: "Would I myself be content, that others should thus deal with me? Why then should I so deal with any man?"

Human laws are often so numerous as to escape our memories; so darkly sometimes and inconsistently worded, as to puzzle our understandings; and their original obscurity is not seldom improved by the nice distinction and subtle reasonings of those who profess to clear them; so that, under these several disadvantages, they lose much of their force and influence; and, in some cases, raise more disputes than perhaps they determine. But here is a law, attended with none of these inconveniencies; the grossest minds can scarce misapprehend it; the weakest memories are capable of retaining it; no perplexing comment can easily cloud it; the authority of no man's gloss upon earth can (if we are but sincere) sway us to make a wrong construction of it. What is said of all the gospel-precepts

by the evangelical Prophet, is more eminently true of this; *it is an high-way; and the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein.* Isaiah, xxxv. 8.

It is not enough that a rule, which is to be of general use, is suited to all capacities; so that, wherever it is represented to the mind, it is presently agreed to: it must also be apt to offer itself to our thoughts, and lie ready for present use, upon all exigences and occasions. And such, remarkably such, is that which our Lord here recommends to us. We can scarce be so far surprised by any immediate necessity of acting, as not to have time for a short recourse to it; room for a sudden glance, as it were, upon it, in our minds, where it rests and sparkles always like the urim and thummim on the breast of Aaron. There is no occasion for us to go in search of it to the oracles of law, dead or living; to the code or pandects; to the volumes of divines or moralists: *quod petis, hic est*; we need look no farther than ourselves for it: for (to use the apposite expressions of Moses) *this commandment, which I command thee this day, is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.* Deut. xxx. 11, 12, 13, 14.

It is, moreover, a precept particularly fitted for practice; as it involves in the very notion of it a motive, stirring us up to do what it enjoins. Other moral maxims propose naked truths to the understanding, which operate often but faintly and slowly on the will and passions, the two active principles of the mind of man: but it is the peculiar character of this, that it addresseth itself equally to all these powers; imparts both light and heat to us; and, at the same time that it informs us certainly and clearly what we are to do, excites us also, in the most tender and moving manner, to the performance of it. We can see our neighbour's misfortune without a sensible degree of concern, which yet we cannot forbear expressing when we have

once made his condition our own, and determined the measure of our obligation towards him, by what we ourselves should, in such a case, expect from him. Our duty grows immediately our interest and pleasure by the means of this powerful principle, the seat of which is, in truth, not more in the brain than in the heart of man: it appeals to our very senses, and exerts its secret force in so prevailing a way, that it is even felt as well as understood by us.

The last recommendation of this rule I shall mention, is its vast and comprehensive influence, for it extends to all ranks and conditions of men, and to all kinds of action and intercourse between them; to matters of charity, generosity, and civility, as well as justice; to negative, no less than positive duties. The ruler and the ruled are alike subject to it. Public communities can no more exempt themselves from its obligation than private persons: *All persons must fall down before it, all nations must do it service.* Psal. lxxii. 11. And, with respect to this extent of it, it is, that our blessed Lord pronounces it in the text to be *the law and the prophets*. His meaning is, that whatever rules of the second table are delivered in the law of Moses, or in the larger comments and explanations of that law, made by the other writers of the old testament [here and elsewhere styled the prophets], they are all virtually comprised in this one short significant saying, *Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them*. From this, as from their common source, they were all originally derived, and into this they may be all ultimately resolved. *For all the law is fulfilled in one word* (saith St. Paul), *even in this, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. Gal. v. 14. And I have shewed you, that this word is the same in sense with the word or precept of the text, though it be not delivered in so clear, so expressive, and so convincing a manner. And this word, therefore, the same apostle calls elsewhere, *The end of the commandment* (1 Tim. i. 5.), and St. James, *The royal law*. Jam. ii. 8. That (they both mean) in which all the lines of duty, relating to our neighbour, centre; and under which, as under one common head and

principle, they may be reduced and ranged.

Various are the uses into which this important truth, thus handled, is capable of being improved.

For from hence I might, in the first place, take occasion to consider, whether, and how far, the precept here given be the whole, not only of the law and the prophets, but of the gospel also; and what evangelical duties there are, which seem, as the schools speak, to transcend it; to be (as mysteries are, in respect of reason) not indeed against this great principle, but above and beyond it; and such as we cannot thoroughly account for, without taking the consideration of another world into our schemes and reasonings.

I might, in the next place, proceed to shew, how large a share moral truths have, even in the body of revealed doctrines, since the precept of the text, which comprehends only the duty we owe to our neighbour, is said to be *the law and the prophets*. An expression, not indeed to be taken rigorously and in the letter, but which may however be understood to imply, that, as a great part of holy writ is employed in directly pressing the duties abridged in this precept, so the rest of it plainly points and refers to them. Even the highest mysteries of faith were not made known to us, without some regard to our improvement in practical virtues; and the knowledge of those, unless it tends to quicken our obedience to these, will be of no manner of service to us, will neither better us in this world, nor save us in the next.

From the assertion in the close of the text, it may be yet farther and more clearly inferred, that there is a chain of moral reasoning, by which the several duties of the second table are connected together, and have an orderly dependance on one common principle, out of which they were drawn. That virtue, therefore, is not the blind homage of our nature, arbitrarily exacted from us, but a duty fitted and proportioned to the light of our faculties, and every way our *reasonable service* (Rom. xii. 1.): in a word, that morality is a true and proper science, and all the parts of it capable of strict demonstration.

An observation of manifold and excellent use! for it teaches us to reject the pretences of those vain and fanciful enthusiasts, who have framed a rule of duty to themselves, as contrary to the common sense and reason, as it is to the current language of mankind; so refined and sublime, as to be utterly unintelligible and impracticable. It is not to be learned or confuted, in the method of other doctrines: it is to be made out only by the force of some unaccountable impressions; by a light that shines inward, and which cannot be communicated or discovered. But *we have not so learned Christ* (Eph. iv. 20.); on the contrary, we are assured, that we do our Lord and Master good service, such as he will own and reward, when we apply ourselves to establish the truths of our religion upon principles of reason, and to argue men into their duty by appealing to natural light, to the certainty of first principles, and to the evident deductions which may from thence be made by the sure rules of discourse; and that we are not to regard the censures of those, who, on this account, shall style us mere moral teachers and carnal reasoners, but will not allow us to speak by the Spirit, or to be at all acquainted with the life and power of godliness: as if religion were a thing designed not to be understood or made out, but lost somewhat of its native majesty and force, when once we came to reason upon it.

Nor would it be an unprofitable reflection, to observe from hence the great benignity and goodness of God, who hath made even our own will, and our self-love, a complete law of action and measure of duty to us. *All things whatsoever ye would [i. e. whatsoever ye are willing], that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them!* Surely a very easy yoke, and light burthen! We may be averse perhaps, from submitting to the divine will, or to the will of any of our fellow-creatures exercising authority over us: but can we be otherwise than contented and pleased in submitting to our own will, whatever it is? And yet a submission to that (when regulated by proper circumstances and views) is all that is required of us. Merciful Saviour, thou saidst once indeed to thy

Father, as thou wert man, *Not my will, but thine be done!* Luke, xxii. 42. But who could expect that thou shouldst have said the same thing to us also, as thou art God! However, thus in effect thou hast said in the precept now before us. Teach us, O Lord, by the means of this precept, so duly to regulate our wills, that we may safely follow them! Make thy will ours, that so, in doing our own will, we may be sure to fulfil thine also!

We see from hence how far the gospel is from suppressing or checking the principle of self-love in us, which it makes the ground and rule of all that love we owe to others; and which therefore we may innocently, nay usefully, carry to what degree, what height we please, if we do but take care that the love of our neighbour keeps pace with that of ourself, and is governed by it. Very extravagant therefore, and unwarrantable are those flights of devotion, which some enthusiastical faints of the church of Rome have indulged themselves in; who make it necessary for every christian, in order to his arriving at perfection, to divest himself of all manner of regard for himself, nay to despise, to hate, and to abhor himself, in the utmost propriety of the expression. Certainly, if what these mystical divines say be true, impossible it is for a perfect man to love his neighbour at all, since he is not allowed, by their scheme, to love himself; and yet is bound to love his neighbour as he loves himself (or, which is all one, to do as he would be done unto), by our Lord's express determination.

Several other weighty truths there are, which this fruitful theme would suggest; and most of those I have mentioned might deserve to be handled more largely. But I must contract my thoughts on this head, that I may have room to insist on one plain, useful inference, wherein I am to apply the doctrine hitherto delivered.—It is this: If the precept of the text be so fundamental and necessary, so obvious and easy, so sure and safe, so full and comprehensive a rule of life and manners, how inexcusable, upon all these accounts, must those persons be, who, throughout the whole course of their actions, shew

that they do not regard it? I shall, first, expostulate the case with such as offend against this precept at large, and then consider that particular and flagrant instance of the breach of it which this day affords us.

Are we then, any of us, professed contemners of revealed religion? I hope we are not; but those who are, would still be thought to have a mighty reverence for reason (since by the help of reason it is that they endeavour to throw off revelation), and while they have, this its eldest and most unquestioned law should, methinks, be very sacred to them. What! shall the great masters of exact thinking, and idolizers of reason, live in a perpetual contradiction to the first principle of it? Will they, who have so little light to guide themselves by (that of nature alone), neglect to make use even of that little which they have? And yet, perhaps, there is no sort of men whatever, that offend so remarkably against the evident righteousness of this rule, as those who pretend most to magnify the principle from whence it flows. There are none who pursue their pleasures so keenly, and soothe all their passions so carefully, are every way so selfish, and so directly set in opposition to this generous and equal maxim, as the men who will tell you, they adore plain common sense, but cannot digest a mystery. From whence it is manifest, that their disesteem of faith proceeds, not from any just esteem they have of reason, or any regard they bear to its laws, but merely from a spirit of libertinism, and a desire of coming under as few obligations as possible. It is not a freedom of thinking which they aim at, but a freedom of living, and of doing what they please, without the control of law, or fear of punishment. And, in order to this, one good step is, to shake off revealed religion: and such an one as is usually followed by another, the parting with all religion, even that which nature itself prescribes. To these reasoners therefore we say, that the rule of doing as they would be done by, is not (what they are so jealous of) any imposition upon their understandings, any puzzling mysterious doctrine, it is all pure light and evidence, *and in it is no darkness at all.* 1 John, i. 5. Why then do they not submit to it? Why do they,

of all men living, do as they would not be done by? Oppress and trample upon their inferiors, revile their betters, and supplant their equals? Carry on their unlawful desires without flint or bounds, to the injuring the property of those who are too weak to contend with them, to the defaming their neighbour's reputation, or defiling his bed? Why, in a word, do they make themselves the only centre of all their actions, wishes, and designs, and regard nothing that is without them, any farther than it may be useful to their purposes and enjoyments? Let us see this lofty race of men in good earnest stoop to this plain dictate of reason, and then we shall be inclined to think them sincere, when they pretend to hearken to the voice of reason, and to that only; and may have room to hope, that the good God, who sees them honestly practising all those virtues which flow from this rule, will add what is behind, and, in his own time, graft grace upon nature.

But do we (as every one, I trust, doth who hears me this day) profess ourselves to be the disciples of Christ? And can we think ourselves really to be what we profess, while we openly and avowedly break this great precept of Christ, the main hinge upon which the morality of his gospel turns? We may boast, if we please, of our having all knowledge and all faith, and of our understanding all mysteries: but if we do not govern our lives by this truth, which is evident by nature, it will be to no purpose that we firmly assent to those truths which are revealed to us by grace. We deny christianity indeed, if we reject these; but if we live in contradiction to that, we renounce the principles of human nature itself, without supposing which there can be no christianity. Let us profess and believe what we will, unless we do also as we would be done unto, all our faith and our religion is vain. Nor is it vain only, and unprofitable, in respect of ourselves: it is also of pernicious consequence to others, who, from such instances as these, will take occasion to disparage the influence and efficacy of revealed religion, and to harden themselves in their infidelity. The ridiculers of divine faith, the despisers of mysteries, never exercise their scornful talent with greater pleasure or success,

than when they attack the principles of christianity, by comparing them with the practice of christians, especially in this capital article of all schemes of religion, the doing to men as we would be done unto; and can point out our manifest and scandalous violations of this plain rule of reason, while we pretend to embrace all the sublime doctrines, and to inherit all the glorious advantages of a divine revelation. The heathen emperor Severus *shall rise up in the judgment with such a generation of Christians, and condemn them* (Mat. xii. 41.): for he, by the light of nature, was taught highly to reverence this precept; it was written on the walls of his palace, and in the banners of his army; it was engraved in his very heart, and transcribed from thence into his practice. Would to God that many of those pretended vicars of Christ, who have since erected their thrones in the chief seat of this prince's empire, had alike succeeded him in an awful and conscientious regard for this excellent maxim, and had been, in that respect, as good christians (or rather as good heathens) as he was! They would not then have become the authors and fomenters of all that discord and confusion, all those wars and massacres, those conspiracies and rebellions, with which they have, for many centuries past, shook the thrones of princes, and disturbed the quiet of this western world. Nor would they, in order to cover and palliate these wicked attempts, have openly encouraged the casuists of their communion to publish such loose and scandalous systems of morals, as, instead of being comments on this rule, are a perfect contradiction to it, and are calculated, not to bring up men's obedience to the terms of the gospel, but to bring down the gospel terms, as near as can be, to the infirmities and failings, nay to the corruptions and vices, of human nature.

S E R M O N IX. Of religious Retirement.

MATTH. xiv. 23.

When he had sent the multitude away, he went up into a mountain, apart, to pray.

IT hath been disputed, which is a state of greater perfection, the social or the solitary; whereas, in truth, neither of

these estates is complete without the other, as the example of our blessed Lord (the unerring test and measure of perfection) informs us. His life (which ought to be the pattern of ours) was a mixture of contemplation and action, of austerity and freedom. We find him often where the greatest concourse was, in the market-places, in the synagogues, and at festival entertainments; and we find him also retiring from the crowd into a desert or a garden, and there employing himself in all kinds of religious exercise and intercourse with God, in fasting, meditation, and prayer. In imitation of his spotless example, we may doubtless lead public lives innocently and usefully, conversing with men, and doing good to them: mutually sowing and reaping the several comforts and advantages of human society. But because the pleasures of conversation, when too freely tasted, are intoxicating and dangerous, because the temptations we there meet with are many and mighty, and even where the spirit is willing to resist, yet the flesh is often weak, we ought therefore to lessen the too great complacency we are apt to have in such satisfactions, by fit intermissions of them; to strengthen ourselves for such public encounters by our religious privacies; to retire from the world sometimes, and converse with God and our own consciences, examining the state, and fortifying the powers of our souls in secrecy and silence: we must do as our Lord did, *send the multitudes away, and go up into the mountain, apart, to pray.*

I shall, from these words, take occasion to discourse to you concerning the great (but much neglected) duty of religious retreat and recollection. I shall, first, briefly shew you under what limitations I would be understood to recommend the duty; and then, what the advantages are which arise from a devout and discreet performance of it.

I mean not to press upon you that sort of retirement which is so much esteemed and practised in the church of Rome, where all perfection is reckoned to consist in solitude, and no man is allowed capable of arriving at the height of virtue, who doth not strip himself of all the conveniences of life, and renounce all manner of acquaintance with

the world, and the things of it. I see not wherein this state of life claims the pre-eminence over all others; how it is founded in nature and reason; what particular example, precept, or direction, there is in the gospel inviting us to it. John the Baptist is indeed there represented as sequestering himself from human converse, and spending his time *in the wilderness* (Luke, i. 17.); but as he is said to have come *in the spirit and power of Elias* (Luke, ix. 55.) (a spirit far different from the spirit of the gospel), and did therefore professedly imitate that prophet in his severe manner of life, and look, and diet, and garb, and behaviour, and doctrine, so his example belonged rather to the Mosaic state, under which he lived and taught, than to the Christian dispensation, which began where his preaching ended. Nor did even the Baptist himself propose his own practice as a pattern to his followers: on the contrary, when the people, the publicans, and the soldiers, inquired of him, what they should do to *flee from the wrath to come*; he did not exhort them to go out of the world into the wilderness, but gave them such directions only as related to a faithful discharge of their duty in their several stations and callings. And when afterwards our Saviour began to enter on his ministry, and to appear as our Saviour, by publishing the gospel of his kingdom, we find nothing either in his actions or his doctrine to countenance that recluse and solitary state, which some since, who would be thought best to have imitated his example and obeyed his precepts, have so zealously espoused and practised. His divine discourses were chiefly spent in pressing men to exercise those graces which adorn the sociable state: even his first sermon on the mount to the multitude did, in the entrance of it, recommend and enjoin a public, conspicuous, and exemplary virtue; and (with some allusion perhaps to that eminence on which he sat, and the company which surrounded him) he then likened his disciples to *a city set on an hill, that cannot be hid* (Mat. v. 14.); he commanded them to *put their light in a candlestick, not under a bushel, and so to make it shine before men, that they, seeing their good works, might glorify*

their Father which is in Heaven. Ver. 15, 16.

Far be it from me, however, to condemn all those good and holy persons, who have betaken themselves to this solitary and austere course of living. Doubtless many of them were acted by a sincere but misguided principle of piety, the fruits of which, though mixed with a great allay of superstition, did yet, in divers respects, redound to the credit of religion and the good of mankind. But supposing these to be real, yet they were, I say, uncommanded instances of virtue, not possible, or if possible, not fit to be practised by the far greater part of christians. The retreat therefore which I am speaking of is, not that of monks and hermits, but of men living in the world, and going out of it for a time, in order to return into it; it is a temporary, not a total retreat; such as we may leave off or resume at pleasure, according as we have need of it, or an opportunity for it; such as is consistent with all the business, and even with the innocent pleasures of life, and is so far from interfering with the duties of our public offices and stations, that it disposes and enables us for the better discharge of them. It is this sort of retreat which may properly be made the matter of general exhortation from the pulpit, because it is really matter of general obligation to every good and sincere christian.

No man is, or ought to be, so deeply immersed in the affairs of this world, as not to be able to retire from them now and then into his closet, there to mind the concerns of another. Every day of his life, early or late, some moments he may and must find to bestow this way: the Lord's day particularly, is a great opportunity of this kind, which can never wholly be neglected without indevotion, or even without scandal: and such also is the annual season of recollection in which we are now far advanced, not, I trust, without having employed it, in some measure, to those good purposes for which it was intended. At such times as these, either when the labours and ordinary occupations of life cease, or when public diversions and entertainments are forbidden, then every one, the noble and the mean, the

weakly

wealthy and the poor, hath it certainly in his power, if it be but in his heart, to retire; to step aside from the hurry and vanities of life, and all the allurements of sense, and to examine and improve, and enjoy himself in private.

That we may be all excited so to do, I shall proceed, in the next place, to represent to you the several advantages attending this religious practice, whether we consider it as a means of effacing the ill impressions made on our minds in daily conversation, or as an opportunity of pursuing farther degrees of perfection, and abounding in all the methods of spiritual improvement.

The advantages of the first kind which it affords us are plainly such as these, that it unites and fixes our scattered thoughts, places us out of the reach of the most dangerous temptations, frees us from the insinuating contagion of ill examples, and hushes and lays asleep those troublesome passions, which are the great disturbers of our repose and happiness.

A dissipation of thought is the natural and unavoidable effect of our conversing much in the world, where we cannot help squandering away a great deal of our time upon useless objects, of no true worth in themselves, and of no real concern to us. We roll on in a circle of vain empty pleasures, and are delivered over continually from one slight amusement to another; ever seemingly very busy, and ever really very idle; applying ourselves without respite to that which it becomes us most to neglect, and utterly neglectful of that one thing necessary, which it becomes and behoves us most to pursue. This gives us by degrees such a levity and wantonness of spirit, as refuses admittance to all serious thoughts, and renders us incapable of reflection; makes our closet a terrible place to us, and solitude a burthen. To retrieve ourselves from this vain, uncertain, roving, distracted way of thinking and living, it is requisite to retire frequently, and to converse much with (what we above all things love, and yet above all things hate to converse with) ourselves; to inure our minds to recollection, to fix them on the greatest and most concerning objects, those which religion suggests, and which will, by their importance, deserve and engage, and

command our attention, till the busy swarm of vain images that besets us be thoroughly dispersed, and the several scattered rays of thought, by being thus collected together, do, by little and little, warm our frozen hearts, and at last produce an holy flame.

The expedience of retirement is yet greater, as it removes us out of the way of the most pressing and powerful temptations that are incident to human nature. Ye all know by experience, that these meet us most frequently, and affect us most strongly in society, where our senses, the great inlets of temptation, are most awakened, and tempting objects, by their number and nearness, make the most vivid and lasting impressions upon us. Indeed, there is no place, no state or scene of life, that hath not its proper and peculiar temptations; even solitude itself is not without them, but they are few and faint in comparison with those to which our appearance on the great stage of the world exposes us; and whenever they attack us in our recesses, they do, or may find us prepared and upon our guard: we are then at leisure to encounter them, and have helps near at hand, which, if made use of, will enable us to decline or baffle them; whereas in public, we are merely passive to such impressions, which strike our minds so violently, and succeed each other so fast, that we have no opportunity, no strength, no inclination almost to withstand them.

The great risque which virtue runs in company is from the neighbourhood of ill examples, which are of so contagious a nature, that if we live much amongst them, we shall as surely be corrupted by them, as he that often breathes an ill air will at last partake of the infection. It is dangerous for the most innocent person in the world to be too frequently and nearly a witness to the commission of vice and folly. Such views lessen the natural horror we have for such actions, and render the thoughts of them more familiar, and less displeasing to us, especially when we are used to see ill things practised by persons whom we regard: the favourable opinion we have of the doer extends itself to the action done, and leads us insensibly from seeing to approving, and from approving to imitating. And thus being (the very

best of us) prone to do evil, and living in the midst of evil; being attacked thus from without, and betrayed from within, we are not capable of making an effectual resistance. The only refuge we have is in retreat, where we may at leisure correct the ill impressions that have been made upon us, and, by disuse and distance, weaken the force of those ill influences which we could not wholly avoid.

Another advantage which retirement affords us is, that it calms and composes all the passions, those especially of the tumultuous kind, which, while the business and pleasures of life possess our hearts, are under a restless and violent agitation. We seldom mix long in conversation, without meeting with some accident that ruffles and disturbs us; somewhat that plays either upon our hopes or our fears, our aversions or desires. An injurious or slighting word is thrown out, which we think ourselves obliged to resent; or some innocent expression of ours is misinterpreted and resented by others, and that provokes a return. Our enemy comes in our way, and kindles thoughts of aversion and hatred in us: we look upon those who are above us in all the advantages of life with envious eyes, and with contempt on those who are beneath us. Thus are we delivered over from passion to passion, tossed and disquieted in our minds, during the intercourse we maintain with the world; but when we quit it, and retire, all these winds are presently laid, and there is a perfect calm. The objects which excite us being removed, our appetites also languish and die away; we possess our souls in patience and peace, and enjoy a profound tranquillity and rest, the pleasure of which is great to those who are so happy as to have a relish for it, and is enhanced by being always tasted with innocence.

Wouldst thou then be free from envy and scorn, from anger and strife, fly from the occasions of them: steal away from the great scene of passion and business into thy privacy, shut the doors about thee, *commune with thy own heart in thy chamber, and be still.* Psalm iv. 4. There all animosities are forgotten, all pursuits, all competitions cease; there all marks of distinction are laid aside; the great and the lowly, the prince and the sub-

ject, are upon the level; equally under the eye of one common Master, equally desirous of pleasing him, and mindless of lesser interests and concerns. There the vanities and vexations of this world are shut out, and the considerations of another are let in, and our soul enjoys that sweet contentment and repose which it enjoys no where else, on this side heaven.

I have hitherto considered the usefulness of religious retreat, with respect to some ill impressions made upon us in conversation, which it removes: I shall now consider it as productive of the chief christian graces and virtues, inasmuch as it affords us the best opportunity of knowing God and ourselves, and of taking all the proper methods to reconcile and approve ourselves to God, which are consequent upon such a knowledge. For though it be expedient for every rank and order of men, yet is it more particularly advantageous to penitents, to go up with our Saviour into the mountain, apart, to pray.

It is our duty and our privilege, our chief honour and happiness, to be *acquainted with God* (Job, xxii. 21.); and this acquaintance can never be made, but where we divest ourselves of all other acquaintance in our closets. When we have called off our thoughts from worldly pursuits and engagements, then (and not till then) are we at liberty to fix them on the best, the most deserving, and desirable of objects, God. To study his blessed nature and perfections, to imprint a filial awe of him on our hearts, a lively sense of his perpetual inspection and presence; to abound in all the methods of devout application to him, in acts of petition and praise, of joy and wonder, of submission and hope, of love and affiance; to open all our wants, and impart all our griefs to him, and to express, in the most significant manner we are able, our entire and unlimited dependence upon him: till, by often dwelling on such thoughts and reflections as these, we have made them familiar, habitual, and natural to us, and can have as easy and delightful a recourse to God, in all accidents, and upon all occasions, as a son hath to a beloved and loving parent, who, he knows, is at all times able to assist, and ready to receive him. In a word, till we can look up to God in each

each step of our conduct, as the supreme end and guide of all our actions, the fixed centre of all our wishes, desires, and designs, till we bring ourselves to love nothing in competition with him, nothing but in order to the enjoyment of him, and resolve to do nothing, and be nothing, but what we are sure will please him.

Can any thing refine, raise, or ennoble our natures more than such a conversation as this, which is thus begun, improved, and perfected in solitude? Shall we not think it worth our while to cease for a time from cultivating useless and perishing friendships with men, that we may be the more at leisure, and the better qualified, to enter into this divine correspondence, which is of the vastest concern to us, and upon which our everlasting welfare depends?

While indeed our hearts are deeply engaged in the concerns of this world, we cannot well relish the pleasures of such a spiritual commerce: but, after we have once accustomed and inured ourselves to it, we shall find it the most delightful entertainment of the mind of man, pleasing as light to the eyes, *sweeter than honey and the honey-comb*. Sensual men may make sport with such a pretence, and call it enthusiasm, and the product of an heated imagination; but they that taste the satisfaction, know it to be real, and would not part with it for all the delights this world can afford; and which (in the disparaging phrase of the apostle) they *count but as dung*, in comparison of the *excellency of this knowledge of God, and Christ Jesus*. Phil. iii. 8.

As religious retirement is a great means of advancing us in the knowledge of God, so doth it assist us towards attaining a true knowledge of ourselves, towards searching and trying all our ways, and getting a right information concerning the state of our consciences. He that will thrive in his temporal affairs, must often balance his accounts, examine his gains and his losses, and see what proportion they bear to each other; consider where his conduct may have been faulty in any respect, and how for the future to rectify it. The same vigilance and care is requisite in relation to our spiritual concerns also, and we can never exert it effectually but in the closet, where privacy and silence befriend our enquiries.

When the importunity of outward objects ceases, when the noise and avocations of a troublesome world are at a distance, we may enter upon these searches without difficulty, and finish them without interruption. We may then look inwards, and take a distinct view of what at other times passes there unobserved; of our hidden inclinations and aversions, of the springs which secretly move us in all our pursuits; of the temptations that beset us hardest, and most frequently foil us; of the ground that we have lost or got in our several encounters. And when we are advanced thus far in the knowledge of ourselves, and of our ruling sins and infirmities, we have taken the most useful and necessary step towards abounding in the three great duties of the penitent, contrition, resolution, and prayer.

Contrition is an holy grief, excited by a lively sense, not only of the punishment due to our guilt (that the schools call *attrition*), but likewise of the infinite goodness of God, against which we have offended, accompanied with a detestation of our sin, and of ourselves for the sake of it. At this act of the mind repentance (properly speaking) begins; and this godly concern of heart is rarely attained, to be sure, it can never be duly exerted and improved, but in private. And, therefore, in the story of St. Peter we may observe, that as soon as a conviction of his guilt had seized him, it is said, that *he went out and wept bitterly* (Matth. xxvi. 75.); he withdrew into a secret place, where he might mourn his own fall with freedom; where he might feed and raise up to a due height the inward anguish he felt, and indulge himself in all the expressions of sincere sorrow. The wounds of conscience, like other wounds, though generally received in public, must always be healed in private: there they may be laid open and searched to the bottom; there the raging smart of them is best endured; and there suitable remedies are most easily and most usefully applied; where leisure and rest, silence, and a proper discipline, assist the patient, and promote the cure.

The next step to contrition is, resolution, or a firm immutable purpose of heart, never more to allow ourselves in that transgression, which we now abominate and deplore. And, in order to the forming

forming such a well weighed and stable resolution, there must be a calm and clear foresight of the difficulties which may attend the execution of it, and a just computation of our own strength to bear up against them; we must deliberately consider under what circumstances the temptation, against which we are now arming ourselves, hath beset us hardest, and how, for the future, we may best decline them; what helps and supports we have by experience found most useful, and how, in the day of trial, we may be secure of them; to what a broken-dispirited state of mind we have already reduced ourselves, by so often and lightly departing from what we had purposed; and with how much greater difficulty every time that we give way, we recover our ground. I need not prove to you, that these, and the like reflections, which are necessary towards our resolving well and wisely, can never be dwelt on, in all their due compass and force, but at leisure, and in sacred retirement. Doubtless, the good Psalmist had been some time in his closet, and on his knees, when he uttered those emphatical words; *I have sworn, and am stedfastly purposed to keep thy righteous judgments.* Psalm cxix. 100.

But of all the duties of the penitent, that which privacy best qualifies us for, is prayer; which it enables us to perform in such a manner as is likely to be most prevalent and effectual. Great indeed is the excellence and advantage of public devotions, as they testify our common reverence of the Divine Being, as they are best fitted to implore, or to acknowledge public blessings, and as they excite a public emulation in the breasts of sincere worshippers. However, in some respects, they must yield the pre-eminence to closet-prayer; particularly in this, that they are not so well calculated as that to procure ease and repose of conscience to the sinner, and to adjust particular accounts between God and our souls. For it is of special use to this purpose in these three respects, as it affords us the best opportunity of being fixed, fervent, and circumstantial in our addresses to God.

In the solemn service of the sanctuary, let us endeavour never so much to prevent distractions, we shall now and then be sensible of them: outward objects will

break in upon our senses, and divert the application of our minds; even the length of the office, and the daily return of the same forms, will, to persons not rightly qualified and disposed, occasion spiritual languors and wanderings. And this is not the case only of stated forms; the same inconvenience doth, in a much higher degree, belong to unpremeditated prayer; the hearers of which must first judge of the fitness, both of the matter and the expression, before they can reasonably join in what they hear. And thus the novelty of the phrase, instead of fixing, breaks and divides the attention of a sincere worshipper; his curiosity indeed may be awakened by this means, but his devotion is certainly checked and suspended. Now, these obstacles are all removed, these inconveniencies are prevented, when we pray in private. We are then placed immediately under the eye of God which awes us; but under no other eyes, and in the neighbourhood of no other objects, which might divert or discompose us. We are at liberty to employ that part of our time in the performance of this service, when we find ourselves best disposed for it; to make choice of our own thoughts, and our own words, such as are best suited to our present necessities and desires; and what is thus passing within ourselves, we cannot but perceive and attend to. We may break off from the duty, whenever we find our attention flags, and return to it at a more seasonable opportunity.

Nor are we capable, at such times, of being more fixed only, but likewise more fervent and inflamed. True religion is ever modest and reserved in its demeanor, when it appears in public; jealous of doing any thing that may favour of vanity and ostentation; unwilling to allow itself in any such earnestness of speech, or singularity of behaviour, as may call off the eyes and ears of others to observe them: it contents itself, for the most part, with a composed and serious look, with a simple and unaffected carriage. But when public regards and restraints are taken off, the pious soul may then let itself loose into the highest fervours of zeal, into the freest raptures of thought, and into a suitable vehemence and warmth of expression: there is no sort of holy address, which it is not then allowed

allowed to make use of; no outward signs of devotion and reverence, which it may not decently abound in.

There is yet another great advantage that attends our private devotions: they give us leave to be as express and particular as we please in our representations. In the church, the sinner and the faint, men of all ranks, distinctions, and attainments in virtue, must join in the same common forms; and though each of them may, by a sudden glance of mind, adapt the general words to his own circumstances, yet one branch of the service presses too fast upon another to admit of any pause between them; and they therefore who lie under the load of any particular guilt, rise not from their knees with so much comfort as they would have done, had they been at liberty to dwell upon it, and confess it in all its aggravations. This liberty their closet, and that alone, can afford them. There they may expatiate as much as they please upon their wants and unworthiness; there they may pour out all their complaints to God, and lay open all their griefs and fears, and send up all their thanks and acknowledgments: there importunities are not forbidden, repetitions are not unbecoming, but they may persist knocking till it is opened to them, and asking till they have obtained.

These are some of the many spiritual advantages which the present hours of holy recollection, when well employed, will be sure to afford us. And God grant that all of us may, as we have opportunity and leisure, so employ them!

Indeed, the greater our sphere of public action is, the less time we can allow ourselves to spend in these religious exercises; but still some of it is due to them, nor can any secular cares or avocations whatsoever wholly excuse us from paying it. Our blessed Lord, we are sure, had very great business to transact with mankind, and a very short time in which to finish it; and yet, during his three years conversation on earth, we find him often exchanging the duties of the active and public state for those of the solitary and private, *sending the multitudes away, and going up into the mountain, apart, to pray.* And we are sure that in this, as well as other respects,

he left us an example, that we should follow his steps. 2 Pet. ii. 21.

To him, together with the Father and the blessed Spirit, three persons and one God, be ascribed all majesty, dominion, and power, now and for evermore. Amen.

S E R M O N XI.

A Funeral Sermon.

I COR. XV. 19.

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

SUCH discourses, on such mournful occasions as these, were instituted, not so much in honour of the dead as for the use of the living: that opportunity may be taken from hence, to excite in persons attending on these solemnities, a due sense of the uncertainty and vanity of all earthly satisfactions; to imprint upon their minds, by proper arguments and reflections, a lively persuasion of the certainty of a future state, and an earnest desire of fitting and preparing themselves for it.

There is no season to which such thoughts as these are more suitable, nor any wherein men are likely to be more affected with them; and therefore I have chosen (not unfitly, I hope) to explain to you, at present, that great argument for a future state which St. Paul hath couched in the words I have read to you. *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.*—That is, if all the benefits we expect from the Christian institution were confined within the bounds of this present life, and we had no hopes of a better state after this, of a great and lasting reward in a life to come, we Christians should be the most abandoned and wretched of creatures: all other sorts and sects of men would evidently have the advantage of us, and a much surer title to happiness than we.

This concession the apostle openly makes, and from hence he would be understood to infer (though the inference be not expressed), that therefore there must needs be another state, to make up the inequalities of this, and to salve all irregular appearances; since it is

is impossible to conceive that a just and good God should suffer the justest and best of men (such as the best christians certainly are) to be oftentimes the most miserable.

If St. Paul found it necessary earnestly to press this argument on the Corinthians, soon after he had planted the gospel among them, and confirmed it by miracles, it cannot but be highly requisite for us, who live at such a distance from that age of miracles, to support and enliven our faith, by dwelling often on the same considerations; and this argument therefore I shall endeavour to open and apply, in the following discourse: wherein,

(I.) First, I shall shew the undoubted truth of the apostle's concession, and from thence shall establish, in the

(II.) Second place, the truth of that conclusion which he builds upon it.

(III.) After which I shall suggest to you some rules and directions, which, if duly pursued, will enable you to live like those who have their hope in another life; like men, who look upon themselves as being only on their passage through this state, but as belonging properly to that which is to come: on which therefore their eye, their aim, and their hopes are altogether fixed and employed.

(IV.) And these general reflections shall be followed (as they will very naturally be followed) by a just and faithful account of that valuable person, whose remains now lie before us.

I. As to the concession of the apostle, I shall urge it somewhat farther than the letter of the text will carry us: proving to you, under two different heads, that were there no other life but this, first, men would really be more miserable than beasts; and secondly, the best men would be often the most miserable: I mean, as far as happiness or misery are to be measured from pleasing or painful sensations; and supposing the present to be the only life we are to lead, I see not but that this might be esteemed the true measure of them.

First, Were there no life after this, men would be more miserable than beasts; for in this life it is plain that beasts have, in many respects, the advantage

of them, inasmuch as they enjoy greater sensual pleasures, and feel fewer corporal pains, and are utter strangers to all those anxious and tormenting thoughts which perpetually haunt and disquiet mankind.

The pleasures of sense are probably relished by beasts in a more exquisite degree than they are by men, for they taste them sincere and pure always, without mixture or alloy, without being distracted in the pursuit, or disquieted in the use of them.

They follow nature in their desires and fruitions, carrying them no farther than she directs, and leaving off at the point at which excess would grow troublesome and hazardous; so that their appetite is not destroyed or dulled by being gratified, but returns always fresh and vigorous to its object. Hence their organs are generally better disposed than ours for receiving grateful impressions from sensible objects, being less liable to be vitiated by diseases and other bodily accidents, which disorder our frame, and extremely lessen the complacency we have in all the good things of this life that surround us. Nor are the pleasures which the brutal part of the creation enjoy, subject to be lessened any way by the uneasiness which arises from fancy and opinion. They have not the art of growing miserable upon the view of the happiness of others, it being the peculiar privilege of thinking beings, when they are otherwise sufficiently blessed, to create trouble to themselves, by needless comparisons.

They are under no checks from reason and reflection, which, by representing perpetually to the mind of man the meanness of all sensual gratifications, do, in great measure, blunt the edge of his keenest desires, and pall all his enjoyments. They are not aware of a superior good, or of any higher end to which they might be ordained. They feel no inward reproaches for transgressing the bounds of their duty, and the laws of their nature. They have no uneasy presages of a future reckoning, wherein the pleasures they now taste must be accounted for, and may perhaps be outweighed by the pains which shall then lay hold of them. None of their satisfactions are impaired by the fear of losing them, by that dread of death

death which hangs over the mere natural man, and like the hand-writing on the wall, damps all his mirth and jollity; and by which he is, as the apostle speaks, *all his life-time subject unto bondage* (Heb. ii. 15.): that is, in a mean, dejected, slavish state of mind. In a word, they have no concern for what is past, no uneasy expectations of what is to come, but are ever tied down to the present moment, and to the present enjoyment, and in that they are vigorously and totally employed.

In these respects it may be truly affirmed, that if we had hope in this life only, men would be really more miserable than beasts; and on the same account,

Secondly, The best of men would be often the most miserable; for their principles give them not leave to taste so freely of the pleasures of life as other men's do, and expose them more to the troubles and dangers of it.

The principles of good men give them not leave to taste so freely of the pleasures of life as other men's do: for their great and prevailing principle is, to sit as loose from those pleasures, and be as moderate in the use of them, as they can, in order to maintain the empire of the mind over the body, and keep the appetites of the one in due subjection to the reasoning powers of the other. No small part of virtue consists in abstaining from that wherein sensual men place their felicity: in *mortifying the deeds of the body, and making no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof*. Rom. xiii. 14. A truly good man thinks himself obliged, not only to forbear those gratifications which are forbidden by the rules of reason and religion, but even to restrain himself in unforbidden instances, when by allowing himself in what is innocent, he would either run the risk of being farther betrayed into what is not so, or would breed matter of offence to his weak and misjudging neighbour. He lives not for himself alone, but hath a regard in all his actions to the great community wherein he is enclosed; and gives the reins therefore to his appetites no farther, than the indulging them is consistent with the general good and happiness of society.

He is so far from grasping at all the advantages and satisfactions of this world,

which are possible to be attained by him, that he thinks the bounding of his desires and designs within the line which his birth and fortune have marked out, to be a great and indispensable duty. He hath learnt, in *whatsoever state he is, therewith to be content* (Phil. vi. 11.), and doth not therefore eagerly aspire after an higher condition of life, is not oversolicitous to procure to himself a larger sphere of enjoyment.

From these and many other considerations (which I need not mention) it is manifest, that the best of men do generally enjoy least of the pleasures and satisfactions of life: it is as manifest, that they are most exposed to the troubles and dangers of it.

They are determined to live up to the holy rule by which they have obliged themselves to walk, whatever may be the consequences of it, though fore evils, and great temporal inconveniences, should sometimes attend the discharge of their duty. The hypocrite hath the art of bending his principles and practice always to whatever is for his convenience, and of falling in with the fashion of a corrupt and wicked world; but the truly upright man is inflexible in his uprightness, and unalterable in his purposes: nothing can make him remiss in the practice of his duty, no prospect of interest can allure him, no fear of danger can dismay him.

It will be his lot often to look singular in loose and licentious times, and to become a by-word and a reproach on that account among the men of wit and pleasure. *He is not for our turn* (will they say, as their words are represented in the book of Wisdom), *he is clean contrary to our doings; he was made to reprove our thoughts; he is grievous unto us, even to behold; for his life is not like other men's, his ways are of another fashion*. Wisd. ii. 12. 14, 15. And these ill thoughts, once entertained, will (we may be sure), as occasion offers, be followed by worse usage.

Some christian virtues (for instance, humility and meekness) do, as it were, invite injuries; for it is an encouragement to base and insolent minds to outrage men, when they have hopes of doing it without a return. If it be a man's known principle to depart from his right in a small matter, rather than break christian

christian peace, ill men will be tempted to make illegal and unjust encroachments upon him. He who resolves to walk by the gospel rule, of forbearing all attempts, all desire of revenge, will probably have opportunities, every now and then, given to exercise his forgiving temper.

Thus good and pious persons are, by the nature and tendency of their principles, more exposed to the troubles and ill accidents of life, as well as greater strangers to the pleasures and advantages of it, than other less conscientious men are; and on both these accounts, what the apostle lays down in the text is evidently and experimentally true, that *if in this life only they had hope, they were of all men most miserable.*

II. From which concession, which he thus openly makes, he would be understood (as I told you) to infer, though the inference be not expressed, that there must therefore necessarily be another state to make up the inequalities of this, and to salve all irregular appearances. For if God be infinitely holy and pure, and just and good, he must needs take delight in those of his creatures that resemble him most in these perfections. He cannot but love virtue wherever it is, and reward it, and annex happiness always to the exercise of it; and yet this is so far from being the case, that the contrary often happens in this life, where even the greatest saints are sometimes made the most remarkable instances of suffering. We may therefore surely conclude, that there must be a future state, wherein these rewards shall be bestowed, and this love of God to good men made to appear, and the eternal and inseparable connexion between virtue and happiness manifested, in the sight of angels and men. It cannot consist with the divine attributes, that the impious man's joys should, upon the whole, exceed those of the upright; or that the beasts of the field, which serve him not and know him not, should yet enjoy a more entire and perfect happiness than the lord of this lower creation, man himself, made in God's own image, to acknowledge and adore him; and therefore, as certainly as God is, a time there will and must be, when all these unequal distributions of good and evil shall be set right, and the wisdom and

reasonableness of all his transactions with all his creatures be made as clear as the noon day.

And this, before that revelation had enlightened the world, was the very best argument for a future state which mankind had to rest upon. Their philosophical reasonings, drawn from the nature of the soul, and from the instincts and presages of immortality implanted in it, were not sufficiently clear and conclusive. The only sure foundation of hope, which the wisest and most thoughtful men amongst the heathen pretended in this case to have, was from the consideration suggested in the text; and from thence some of them reasoned without doubt or hesitancy, and lived and died in such a manner as to shew that they believed their own reasonings.

It may suffice thus far to have enlarged on that great argument of a future state, which is urged by St. Paul in the words before us. "If in this life only we had hope, men would really be more miserable than beasts; and the best of men oftentimes the most miserable. But it is impossible to imagine, that a God of infinite wisdom and goodness should distribute happiness and misery so unequally and absurdly; it remains therefore, that good men have a well-grounded hope in another life, and are as certain of a future recompence as they are of the being and attributes of God."

III. The best use I can make of this comfortable truth, thus explained, is, to exhort you from thence to live like those who have their hope in another life: like men who look upon themselves as being upon their passage only through this present world, but as belonging properly to that which is to come. And thus we may be said to live, if we observe the following plain rules and directions, which are not the less useful because they are plain ones. Several of them will give a natural occasion to those who knew the deceased person, of anticipating his character in their thoughts: for he did really in good measure (and with due allowances made for human frailties) govern himself by them; and I may, for that reason I hope, be suffered to insist the more freely upon them.

Now

Now to live like those that have their hope in another life, implies,

First, That we indulge ourselves in the gratifications of this present life very sparingly; that we keep under our appetites, and do not let them loose into the enjoyments of sense, but so use the good things of this world, as not abusing them, so take delight in them, as to remember that we are to part with them, and to exchange them for more excellent and durable enjoyments: *Brethren* (says St. Peter), *I beseech you, as pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts.* 1 Pet. ii. 11. They who pass through a foreign country towards their native home, do not usually give up themselves to an eager pursuit of the pleasures of the place, ought not to dwell long upon them, and with greediness, but make use of them only for their refreshment on the way, and so as not to be diverted from pursuing their journey.

A good christian must partake of those grateful repasts of sense which he meets with here below, in like manner as the Jews did of their Passover, *with their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, and their staff in their hand, eating it in haste.* Exod. xii. 11. That is, he must always be in a travelling posture, and so taste sensual pleasures, as one that is about to leave them, and desires to be stopped as little as he can by them, in his way towards the end of his hopes, the salvation of his soul. And to this custom of the Jews St. Peter, in his exhortation to sobriety and temperance, may be supposed to allude: *Wherefore* (says he), *gird up the loins of your mind, and be ye sober.* 1 Pet. i. 13.

Indeed, it is impossible for a man to have a lively hope in another life, and yet be deeply immersed in the enjoyments of this: inasmuch as the happiness of our future state so far exceeds all that we can propose to ourselves at present, both in degree and duration, that to one firmly persuaded of the reality of that happiness, and earnestly desirous of obtaining it, all earthly satisfactions must needs look little, and grow flat and unfavoury, especially when by experience he finds, that too free a participation of these, indisposes him extremely for those; for all the duties that are necessary to be performed, and all the good qualities that are necessary to

be attained, in order to arrive at them. He perceives plainly, that his appetite to spiritual things abates, in proportion as his sensual appetite is indulged and encouraged; and that carnal desires kill not only the desire, but even the power of tasting purer delights, and on both these accounts therefore, flies too deep a draught of all earthly enjoyments: *Having this hope in him, he purifieth himself, even as he* (i. e. even as the author and revealer of this hope) *is pure.* 1 John, iii. 3.

A second instance, wherein we may be said to live like those who have their hope in another life, is, if we bear the uneasinesses that befall us here with constancy and patience; as knowing, that though our passage through this world should be rough and troublesome, yet the trouble will be but short, and the rest and contentment we shall find at the end, will be an ample recompence for all the little inconveniencies we meet with in our way towards it. We must not expect, that our journey through the several stages of this life should be all smooth and even, or that we should perform it wholly without disasters, ill accidents, and hindrances. While we live in this world, where good and bad men are blended together, and where there is also a mixture of good and evil wisely distributed by God, to serve the ends of his Providence, we are not to wonder if we are molested by the one, as well as benefited by the other. It is our present lot and condition to be subject to such casualties, which therefore, as they ought not to surprise, so much less should they deject us; nor can they, if we look forward, and entertain ourselves with the prospect of that happiness to which we are hastening, and at which, when we arrive, even the remembrance of the difficulties we now undergo, will contribute to enhance our pleasure.

Indeed, while we are in the flesh, we cannot be utterly insensible of the afflictions that befall us. What is in itself harsh and ungrateful, must needs make harsh and ungrateful impressions upon us; and therefore, to pretend to be perfectly easy under any great calamity of life, must be the effect either of hypocrisy or stupidity. However, though it be not in our power to make an affliction no affliction, yet it is certainly in our power to take off the edge, and lessen the

the weight of it; by a full and steady view of those divine joys that are prepared for us in another state; which shall shortly begin, and never end. We may say and think with St. Paul; *I reckon that the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed.* Rom. viii. 18. And thus saying and thinking, we may bear the heaviest load that can be laid upon us with contentedness at least, if not with cheerfulness.

A third instance of our living like those that have their hope in another life is; if we always take the account of a future state into our schemes and reasonings about the concerns of this world, and form our judgments about the worth or emptiness of things here, according as they are or are not of use in relation to what is to come after.

He who sojourns in a foreign country, refers what he sees and hears abroad to the state of things at home. With that view he makes all his reflections and inquiries, and by that measure he judges of every thing which befalls himself or others in his travels. This pattern should be our guide in our present state of pilgrimage, wherein we often misinterpret the events of Providence, and make a wrong use of them, by attending to the maxims of this life only; and so thinking of the world, which we are now in, and of the affairs of it, as if both that and they, and we, had no manner of relation to another, whereas in truth what we see is in order only to what we do not see; and both these states therefore must be joined and considered together, if we intend to reflect wisely and justly on present appearances; for as *no man knoweth love or hatred, so neither can he discern good or evil purely by what is before him.* Eccles. ix. 1.

We, perhaps, when we see vice remarkably prosperous, or virtue in deep distress; when a man who is and does good to mankind, happens to be cut off in the vigour of his strength, and in the midst of his innocent enjoyments, whilst *the wicked grow old, yea are mighty in power* (Job, xxi. 7.), and *come to their grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in, in his season.* Job, v. 25. We, I say, in such cases, are ready to

cry out of an unequal management; and to blame the divine administration; whereas, if we considered that there is another state after this, wherein all these seeming irregularities may be set right, and that in the mean time they are of use to distinguish the sound from the false believer, to exercise the faith of good men, and by that means entitle them to a greater reward; this one consideration would make all our murmurs cease, and all those fancied difficulties vanish.

Many other instances like these there are, wherein (I say) we shall never be able to give ourselves a satisfactory account of the divine conduct, as it appears to us at present, without drawing our arguments and reflections from a future state, and forming such a scheme of things as shall at once take in both time and eternity. We may, in the

Fourth place, be said to live like those that place their hope in another world, when we have in a great measure conquered our dread of death, and our unreasonable love of life, and are even prepared, and willing to be dissolved, and to be with Christ, as soon as ever he thinks fit to call us. Till we have wrought ourselves up into this degree of christian indifference, we are in bondage. We cannot so well be said to have our hope as our fear in another life, while we are mighty loth and unwilling to part with this for the sake of it.

Not that it is in the power of human nature, without extraordinary degrees of divine grace, to look death in the face unconcerned, or to throw off life with the same ease as one doth a garment, upon going to rest. These are heroic heights of virtue, attained but by few, and matter of strict duty to none. However, it is possible for all of us to lessen our natural fears of this kind, by religious considerations; by a firm belief of, and a frequent meditation upon those joys that shall be revealed, to raise ourselves up into a contempt of present satisfactions, and into a resolution of submitting ourselves, if not joyfully, yet meekly and calmly, to the sentence of death, whenever it shall please God to inflict it upon us. This, I say, is a very practicable degree of christian magnanimity and courage, and it is both the duty

duty and the interest of every good christian to attain it; which we shall be the better enabled to do, if, in the

Fifth and last place, We make a proper use of such opportunities as these, and of all other seasons of serious reflection, which are afforded us, in order to fix in our minds a lively and vigorous sense of the things of another world. They are under the disadvantage of being distant, and therefore operate but faintly upon us. To remedy this inconveniency, we must frequently revolve within ourselves their certainty and great importance; so as to bring them near, and make them familiar to us, till they become a constant and ready principle of action, which we can have recourse to upon all occasions.

If we really live under the hope of future happiness, we shall be apt to taste it by way of anticipation and forethought; an image of it will meet our minds often, and stay for some time there, as all pleasing expectations do, and that in proportion to the pleasure we take in them. I appeal to you if it be not so in your temporal affairs. Hath any of you a great interest at stake in a far-distant part of the world? Hath he ventured a good share of his fortune thither; and may reasonably hope for a vast and exceeding return? His thoughts will be often employed on this subject; and, the nearer the time of his expectation approacheth, the more he will think of it; for, *where his treasure is, there will his heart also* most certainly be. Luke, xii. 34. Now, our spiritual interests, and the great concerns of a future state, would, doubtless, recur as often to our minds, and affect them as deeply, if we were but as much in earnest in our pursuit of them; and, therefore, we may take it for granted, that we are not so disposed as we ought to be towards them, if we can forget them for any long time, or reflect on them with indifference and coldness.

That this may not be the case, it will, I say, be necessary for us to take set times of meditating on what is future, and of making it by that means, as it were, present to us: it must be our solemn business and endeavour, at fit seasons, to turn the stream of our thoughts from earthly, towards divine objects; to retire from the hurry and noise of this world, in order to entertain ourselves with the prospect of another.

SERMON XII.

A Charity Sermon.

ST. MATTH. XXV. 40.

Verily, I say unto you; inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

ST. Paul being brought into the Areopagus, or highest court in Athens, to give an account of the doctrine he had preached concerning *Jesus and the resurrection*, fitly took that occasion to imprint on the minds of those magistrates, before whom he stood, the belief of a future judgment, and to shew what connection there was between the rising of Jesus from the grave, and his coming to judge the world. *God, said he, hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.* Acts, xvii. 31. The rising of Jesus from the dead was an irresistible evidence of the truth of his doctrine; and one part of his doctrine was, that he would judge the world. By rising from the dead, he took possession of his kingdom (all power being then *given unto him both in heaven and in earth*), and was to reign till all his enemies were put under his feet (Matth. xxviii. 18.; 1 Cor. xv. 25.); that is, till evil men and evil spirits were judged, which was the last and most illustrious instance, wherein his kingly power was to be exercised; and then (and not till then) he was to *deliver up his kingdom to the Father.* 1 Cor. xv. 24. On these (but more especially on the former of these) accounts, did *God give assurance unto all men, that he would judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he had ordained, in that he raised him from the dead.*

The festival of our Lord's resurrection we have already celebrated; and may now therefore turn our thoughts not improperly to consider the chief consequence of his resurrection, a judgment to come: that branch of it especially which relates to the inquiries that our Judge will then make concerning our obedience to his great commandment of charity; the enforcing of which, is the pious and peculiar design of these annual assemblies.

In the account of that solemnity, which our blessed Saviour himself hath given us, we are told, that he will *then say to them on his right hand; Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me.* Amazed at this merciful sentence, and noways conscious of any such deserts, these good and humble persons are said to reply; *Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? or, when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?* To which our Saviour makes this memorable and gracious return, fit to be engraven in the hearts, and to be for ever sounding in the ears of all industrious promoters of charity; *Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.* True it is, me in person ye never believed, supported, comforted; but since ye performed these kind offices to others (who belonged to me) at my command, and for my sake, I take what you did to them (even to one of the least of them) as done to myself, and shall, under that notion, now give you an exceeding recompence for it. *Come, therefore, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*

I do not think this account is to be understood literally, but with such allowances as are usually made in the explication of our Saviour's parables; which hold, not in every particular circumstance, but only as to the main scope and drift of them. Now the general design of this relation manifestly is, to propose to us two considerations, which are powerful inducements to the practice of charity: one, "That upon this head, we shall chiefly be examined and tried at the great day of account;" the other: "That acts of mercy done to the poor, shall then be accepted and rewarded, as done to our Saviour himself."

Of these two points, the former is sufficiently implied throughout the tenor of our Lord's discourse, wherein all the instances mentioned, relate to the single

head of charity: the latter is directly affirmed, in very emphatical words, and with a solemn preface, never used by our Saviour, but to give us warning of some remarkable truth that is to follow. *Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*

The words, therefore, afford proper matter for our devout reflection, under the two following heads of inquiry:

I. Why, in the account given of the proceedings at the day of judgment, acts of mercy alone are mentioned?

II. In what sense, and for what reasons, it may be presumed, that our Saviour will then accept the acts of mercy we now do to his poor brethren (such he vouchsafes to call them) as done to himself.

I. As to the first of these inquiries, it is to be considered, that the external acts of mercy here mentioned, are supposed to include that principle of divine love or charity from whence they flow, and from which alone they derive all their worth and excellence. It is the inward habit, or grace of charity, which recommends the outward act; so that the least and lowest instances of goodness, springing from this source, are in the sight of God of great price: even a cup of cold water given to a thirsty disciple, in the name of Christ, shall not lose its reward. *Matth. x. 42.* Whereas the most extraordinary and shining acts of charity, when separated from a principle of divine love, are of no value; for, *if we bestow all our goods to feed the poor, and have not charity, it profiteth us nothing.* *1 Cor. xiii. 3.* And, therefore, the

First, and most obvious account of the distinguishing mention here made of acts of mercy, may be taken from the surpassing dignity and worth of that divine grace which produceth them, which St. Paul tells us, is preferable even to faith and hope; for *the greatest of these three is charity.* *1 Cor. xiii. 3.*

I should not wander from my point, if I took occasion here largely to explain the grounds and reasons of this preference; since, whatever excellence there is in the cause or principle, must derive a proportionable excellence also on the effect; and therefore, a full display of those

those grounds and reasons would tend to satisfy our present inquiry. But having other matter to offer, which is of nearer and plainer use, I shall mention them only without insisting upon them.

Charity then (or a love of God which works by a love of our neighbour) is greater than faith or hope, because it supposes these graces to be previously exercised, and is indeed the result and reward of them. Faith steadfastly believes, hope eagerly expects; but love, which is the end and consummation of both, enjoys.

It not only unites us to God, but it makes us like him too, and transforms us into a divine image; for *God is love* (1 John, iv. 8.); whereas faith and hope have no place in the supreme mind, and consequently we ourselves bear no resemblance to God when we abound in them.

Charity is more extensive, as to its object and use, than either of the two other graces, which centre ultimately in ourselves: for we believe and we hope for our own sakes; but love (which is a more disinterested principle) carries us out of ourselves into desires and endeavours of promoting the interests of other beings.

Charity excels also in point of duration, for *it never faileth* (1 Cor. xiii. 8.); it doth not end with this world, but goes along with us into the next, where it will be advanced and perfected: but faith and hope shall then totally fail; the one being changed into sight, the other into enjoyment.

And, indeed, well hath God suited these graces to the several states to which they belong. Faith and hope, which are useful in this life only, may in this life be exercised to perfection. We may have so vigorous and piercing a faith, as can be out-done by no evidence, but that of sight; we may have so erect and lively an hope, as can only be exceeded by fruition, in which it is lost. But love is as endless in its degrees, as it is in its duration, and is fitted, therefore, to an immortal state, where it may be exerted and improved to all eternity.

2dly, And this remarkable property of love will suggest to us one reason, why acts of charity shall be inquired after so particularly, at the day of general account; because good men are then to be consigned over to another state, a state of

everlasting love and charity; and, therefore, the chief inquiry must then be, how they have abounded in those graces which qualify them best for an admission into that state, and for a due relish of the divine pleasures of it; how they have practised charity here, the exercise of which must be their duty and their happiness for ever. Heaven and hell are the proper regions of love and hatred, mercy and uncharitableness. Blessed angels, and pure souls, exercised in the ministry of love, are to possess the one; devils and damned spirits, who are all rage, envy, and malice, are to inhabit the other. When we stand, therefore, on the brinks and confines of those states, at the day of doom, we shall be examined how fit we severally are for such places and such company. According as that appears, our several mansions shall be suitably assigned to us; and men and angels, good and bad, even we ourselves, shall, upon the issue of this single article, acknowledge the justice of the sentence. Indeed,

3dly, This single article is sufficient to absolve or condemn us; for it is the short test and sure proof of universal goodness. The whole duty of a christian is nothing but love, varied through the several kinds, acts, and degrees of it. And works of mercy are the most natural and genuine offspring of love; so that from these a good man is denominated. The scripture, therefore, frequently sums up our duty in charity; and, for that reason, styles it the *fulfilling of the law*, and the *bond of perfectness*. Indeed where charity is (that is, where the blessed fruits of charity, springing from a true principle of divine love, are), there no other christian grace or perfection can be totally wanting; and where charity is not, there may be the imperfect resemblances of other christian graces and virtues, but not those graces and virtues themselves; for such they cannot be, unless fed, and invigorated, and animated by a principle of universal charity. So that our Saviour, by professing to examine us on this head, brings matters to a short issue, a single point, by which our cause may be decided as effectually, as by larger inquiries. It will furnish us with a

4th Reason of his conduct in this cause, if we consider how great a stress he laid upon this duty, while he was upon earth;

how earnestly he recommended it; in how exalted a degree of perfection he prescribed the practice of it to us: so that he cannot but inquire, with a particular concern, how we have complied with it.

It is his peculiar, his distinguishing precept, the special mark and badge of our discipleship: *a new commandment* (said he) *I give unto you, that ye love one another; by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.* John, xiii. 34, 35. And upon the article therefore of our obedience to this new commandment, he himself will declare, whether we do or do not belong to him. It was one of the last injunctions he gave, and often repeated to his disciples, in that divine exhortation he made to them just before he entered on the bloody scene of his passion; it was the great direction he left with them, when he himself was leaving the world. The first and chief inquiry, therefore, when he returns to judgment, will be, what weight his dying words have had with us?

5thly, The nature of the sentence he is to pronounce, the rule of judgment by which he will at the last day proceed, requires that a particular regard be then had to our observation of this precept. We shall be judged by the grace and mercy of the gospel, and not by the rigours of unrelenting justice. God will indeed *judge the world in righteousness*, but it is by an evangelical, not a legal righteousness; and by the intervention of the man Christ Jesus, who is the Saviour, as well as the Judge of the world, and as such hath procured that pardoning grace for us, which mitigates and tempers the severity of the rule, and entitles us to the favour and mercy of our Judge. But what title can he have to mercy himself, who hath not exercised it towards others? *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy* (Matth. v. 7.), in that day when *mercy rejoiceth against judgment.* James, ii. 13. But, on the other hand, *they shall have judgment without mercy, who have shewed no mercy.* Ibid. The power of covering sin is in scripture ascribed to no other grace or virtue whatsoever, but charity: when, therefore, the multitude of our sins is to be judged and punished, the fittest and kindest inquiry that our Judge can make is, what deeds of Charity

we have to allege in extenuation of our punishment?

6thly, The secret manner in which acts of mercy often are, and ought to be performed, requires this public manifestation of them at the great day of account. There are, I think, but three duties, in the performance of which God hath, after a peculiar manner, recommended secrecy to us; alms, fasting and prayer. The two latter of these (as far as we are obliged to secrecy in the discharge of them) relate chiefly to ourselves, and to our own concerns: but the first regards our neighbour alone, and cannot therefore be done altogether without a witness. However, as far as the nature of this duty will admit of privacy, our Saviour hath enjoined it, and in terms of a particular significancy and force. For he knew that good and bountiful minds were sometimes inclined to ostentation, and ready to cover it with a pretence of inciting others by their example; and therefore checks this vanity in these remarkable words; *Take heed, says he, that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them. That thou dost not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do, that they may have glory of men: verily, I say unto you, they have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth.* Matth. vi. 1, 2, 3. And that we might be encouraged punctually to observe this precept, by a reward proportioned to the nature of the duty; therefore he adds; *And thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall himself reward thee openly* (ibid. v. 4.); that is, in the sight of angels and men, at the great day of retribution. For that this is his meaning, may appear from a parallel place in St. Luke, where the reward promised to charity, is thus expressed; *And thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just* (Luke, xiv. 14.); at that time, when *God shall judge the secrets of men by Christ Jesus* (Rom. ii. 16.); shall openly punish their secret sins, and openly own and reward their secret virtues; their acts of charity especially, which as they were, in obedience to his command, performed privately, so they shall now, according to his promise, be rewarded openly. A reward every way congruous and fitting; for it gives God and good men the glory, that would otherwise be lost, of many retired graces and

and virtues, which deserve so much the rather to be published, because they declined observation! It reproaches and fills with confusion those unmerciful and wicked men, who looked upon all such concealed instances of goodness as unprofitable folly, as the *casting of our bread upon the waters* (Eccl. xi. 1.), which they did not think *would thus be found after many days*. It proclaims the triumphs of humanity and goodness in a proper audience, even before the whole race of mankind, then assembled. The objects of mercy themselves will be present, and will, with pleasure, discover the blessed hands that relieved them; nor shall their testimony be wanting, when the Judge of the world doth, as it were, point and appeal to them in the throng, as evidences of the equity of that sentence he is then about to pronounce—*Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me*.

And this furnishes us with yet one more reason why our Saviour lays such a particular stress on acts of mercy, because he looks upon every one of them as a personal kindness done to himself.—*Ye have done it unto me!* How this is to be understood, and upon what account our Lord is pleased to express himself on this occasion with so wondrous a degree of condescension, is what I, upon my second general head, proposed to shew.

II. *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*—*To me!* That is, at my instance, and for my sake; to my brethren, as such, on account of their relation to me; and what is thus done in obedience to my commands, and with a peculiar regard to my person, I esteem a personal kindness, and will acknowledge and reward it accordingly: for, as he elsewhere speaks, *Whoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple* (Mat. x. 41.), [or as belonging to Christ], *verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward*. Mark, ix. 41.

It is certain that those good men, who take such pleasure in relieving the miserable, for Christ's sake, would not have been less forward to minister unto Christ himself, if they had been blessed with an opportunity of doing it. Now, what

they were thus ready to have done, our Saviour reckons as done, and places to their account:—*For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted, according to that a man hath, and not according to that a man hath not*. 2 Cor. viii. 12. And this is the ground of that favourable decision of his, in behalf of the poor widow, who, while *many that were rich cast much into the treasury, threw in two mites*—*Verily* (said he) *she hath cast in more than them all!* Mark, xii. 42, 43. i. e. If she had had as much as they all had, she would have cast in more than they all did; and God respects not the gift, but the bountiful mind and intention of the giver, *calling* (in this sense also) *the things that are not as if they were*. Rom. iv. 17.

But there is yet a more strict and proper sense in which the words of our Lord may be understood. He hath taken our nature upon him, and united it to himself, and is therefore, on the account of this union and alliance, some way interested in the joys and griefs of those who share the same nature with him; for, according to the reasoning of the divine writer to the Hebrews, *both he that sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified, are all of one* [i. e. are all partakers of the same flesh and blood, as he afterwards explains himself]; *for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren*. Heb. ii. 14.

We are indeed his brethren, as we are men: but we are still more so, as we are christians, that is, as members of that mystical body, of which Christ Jesus is the head. Now (as St. Paul argues concerning this mystical body) *whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it: or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it* (2 Cor. xii. 26.): the head specially, which is the principle of life, and motion, and sense to the rest; and from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and being knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. Col. ii. 19. They are still the same apostle's words, who is every where full of this union and sympathy between Christ and his members: having received very strong impressions of it at the time of his conversion, when he heard that voice from Heaven, *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* And he said, *Who art thou, Lord?*

And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. In like manner as Jesus is persecuted when any of his poor members suffer, he is relieved also when they are relieved,—Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Indeed, our Saviour is represented every where in scripture as the special patron of the poor and the afflicted, and as laying their interests to heart (as it were) more nearly than those of any other of his members. The reason of which is not obscurely intimated to us.

Our Saviour's humiliation consisted not merely in taking human nature upon him, but human nature, clothed with all the lowest and meanest circumstances of it. He led a life of great poverty, shame, and trouble, not having where to lay his head, or wherewithal to supply his own wants, without the benevolence of others, or a miracle. *He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; so that the rest of the world hid, as it were, their faces from him.* Isa. liii. 3. Now, in the epistle to the Hebrews, we are told, that by thus taking on him the seed of Abraham, he became a merciful and faithful high-priest, who could be touched with the feeling of our infirmities (Heb. ii. 17.), because he was in all points tempted like as we are (Heb. iv. 15.), and himself also compassed with infirmity. Heb. v. 2. If then, by taking upon himself human nature at large, he hath a compassionate and tender sense of the infirmities of mankind in general, he must needs, in a peculiar manner, feel and commiserate the infirmities of the poor, in which he himself was so eminent a sharer. To the rest of mankind he was allied indeed by his humanity; but to the poor, even by the humble and suffering circumstances of it: he was made in the likeness of men, but most like the meanest among the sons of men, wherefore he is not ashamed to call them brethren, by way of distinction; to publish their near relation to him, to recommend their case particularly to us, to espouse all their interests, to take part in all their afflictions, and even to acknowledge the good offices we do them as done to himself.—*I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto*

one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

I have dispatched the argument in both its branches which I undertook to consider. The use we are now to make of it is obvious and easy: so obvious, that I question not but you have prevented me in this respect, and have all along, as I passed from point to point, applied it yourselves, to the enforcing of the great duty of charity, to the inflaming your souls with an ardent love of it, and a resolution of practising it in such an exalted degree, as becomes the true disciples (nay the friends and brethren) of Jesus. Many excellent things are spoken of this divine grace in scripture; many high encomiums are there given of it, many encouraging promises are made to it: but I question whether all of them taken together, carry more life, and force, and warmth in them, than the two affecting considerations I have explained to you. The wit of man cannot contrive (for even the wisdom of God hath not suggested) any more pressing motives, more powerful incentives to the exercise of charity, than these—That we shall be judged by it at the last dreadful day, and that then, all the acts of mercy we have done to the poor, shall, by our merciful Judge, be owned and rewarded, as personal kindnesses done to himself.

What can awaken us to do good, if the sound of the last trumpet cannot? If a lively sense and anticipation of the great scene of judgment which shall then be unfolded, of the process which shall be formed, of the scrutiny which shall be made, of the sentence which shall be pronounced; if, I say, the bright ideas of these solemnities, which the scripture hath taken care to imprint upon our minds, do not excite us to abound in the labour of love, while it is yet day, ere the night cometh, when no man can work. John, xi. 4. Vain will be the attempt of rousing us into the love and practice of goodness, by any less astonishing methods; all other applications and motives whatsoever will be lost upon us, and we must even be suffered to sleep on in our security, and take our rest, till our judgment, which lingereth not, overtakes us, and our damnation, which slumbereth not, lays hold of us. 2 Pet. ii. 3.

Do we, in good earnest, believe the account of that day's transactions which our Lord hath given us? Let us shew our faith by our works, and pass the time of our sojourning here (as it will then be well for us we had passed it) in the unwearied exercise of beneficence and charity. Can we believe that God hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world by the man Christ Jesus, without believing also, that he will judge it in that very manner, and with those very circumstances, which the Judge himself hath revealed to us? And if so, how can we ever think of appearing at that awful tribunal, without being able to give a ready answer to the questions which he shall then put to us, about the poor and the afflicted, the hungry and the naked, the sick and the imprisoned? What confusion of face shall we be under when that grand inquest begins, when an account of our wealth, and our opportunities of doing good, is displayed on the one side, and a particular of our use, or misuse of them, is given in on the other, and it shall appear, that the good things we have done are few and little in comparison of those we have received? How shall we then wish (to no purpose wish) that it might be allowed us to live over our lives again, in order to fill every minute of them with charitable offices, which, we find, will at that time be of so great importance to us?

In vain shall we then plead (though we could truly plead), that we have been frequent and devout worshippers of God, temperate and sober in our enjoyments, just and conscientious in our dealings. In vain shall we attempt to justify ourselves, as the rich young man in the gospel did, by appealing to the great duties of the law, and saying, *All these have I kept from my youth up* (Matt. xix. 20.); unless we can say also somewhat more for ourselves than he could: even that we have been liberal in our distributions to the poor, and well discharged that important stewardship with which God hath entrusted us. One single instance of relief afforded to the afflicted and the miserable, one cup of cold water given to a disciple: i. e. the smallest act of charity, done out of a sincere principle of goodness, shall then stand us in greater stead, and recommend us more effectually to the favour of our Judge, than all

our pretended zeal for the divine honour, and the advancement of religion; than all the flights and fervours of devotion, than all the rigours and severities of the mortified state, nay, than whatever christian graces and virtues we can suppose it possible to attain, without attaining true christian charity: i. e. such an ardent love of God, as manifests itself in a proportionable love of our neighbour, and particularly in those genuine fruits of love with which christian mercy and tenderness will be sure to inspire us.

This is a truth which cannot be too often or earnestly inculcated, because (important as it is) we are apt, extremely apt, to overlook it, and to persuade ourselves, that if we do but observe the rules of moral honesty in all our transactions; if we wrong no man, or make restitution to those we have wronged, such a righteous and faultless conduct will secure our title to happiness. We own, indeed, that extraordinary acts of charity are commendable, and shall have their reward: but we think we can escape hell without performing them, and are humble enough to be contented with the lowest station in heaven. Human judicatories, we observe, give sentence only on matters of right and wrong, but inquire not into acts of bounty and beneficence; and we easily transfer this known method of proceeding from earthly tribunals to that of heaven. To rectify a mistake of so great consequence as this, it was requisite to assure us, that though the forms and solemnities of the last judgment, as they are described in the gospel, may bear some resemblance to those we are acquainted with here below, yet the rule of proceeding shall be very different: that we shall be tried at that bar, not merely by our righteousness, but moreover and chiefly by our charity: that it will not avail us then to say, we have done no evil, if we have done no good: that however virtues of omission (if I may so speak) will not save us, yet, that sins of omission will certainly damn us. It is because we have not given the hungry meat, and the thirsty drink; because we have not taken in the stranger, and clothed the naked; because we have not visited the sick, and those that are in prison, that we shall be then included in that terrible sentence, *Depart*

from me ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels! The ignorance of those who are strangers to the covenant of Christ may be winked at, and their future happiness secured to them upon lower terms; but it is madness in christians, after such a declaration as this, to flatter themselves with the hopes of getting to heaven, without abounding in the offices of charity. It was chiefly to rouse men up into a sense of their duty and danger in this respect, that our Saviour uttered the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man is not blamed in that parable, as having made use of any unlawful means to amass riches, as having thriven by fraud and injustice, or grown fat upon the spoils of rapine and oppression: all that is there laid to his charge is, that he was *clothed with purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day*, without regarding the wretched condition of Lazarus, who was laid at his gate, and who is said indeed to have desired to feed of the crumbs which fell from his table, but is not said to have obtained what he desired. And even this want of humanity to an object so pitiable and moving, did, it seems, deserve to be punished with everlasting torments. Hear and tremble all ye who *have this world's good, and see your brother have need, and shut up your bowels of compassion from him.* 1 John, iii. 17.

May God touch the hearts of all that are able to contribute to such works of mercy, and make them as willing as they are able! In order to excite their christian compassion, I need use no other motive than that which the text suggests, that the Lord Jesus will look upon whatever we do of this kind as done to himself—*Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me!* Let us carry this consideration always in our view, and endeavour to affect our minds with a lively and vigorous sense of it. We are apt sometimes to wish that it had been our lot to live and converse with Christ, to hear his divine discourses, and to observe his spotless behaviour; and we please ourselves perhaps with thinking, how ready a reception we should have given to him and his doctrine; how forward we should have been in doing all public honours and private services, and

in abounding in all the offices of humanity towards him. The opportunity we wish for we have, for behold he is *with us to the end of the world*, in the persons of the poor and miserable. They are his representatives, his substitutes: deputated by him to receive our bounty, in his name, and in his stead, and we may rest assured (for he is faithful who promised) that the comforts and supports which we extend to his poor brethren, shall be as kindly received, as highly valued, as mightily rewarded, as if he himself had been the object of our pious liberality; and that we shall, on this account, be found, at the day of retribution, among those at his right hand, to whom he will say, *Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me.*

God grant that every one of us may, by thus shewing mercy, entitle ourselves to the mercy of Jesus!

To Him, with the Father and blessed Spirit, be rendered all majesty, might, and dominion, for ever! Amen.

S E R M O N XIII.

An Acquaintance with God the best Support under Afflictions.

JOB, xxii. 21.

Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace.

THE exceeding corruption and folly of man is in nothing more manifest, than in his averfeness to entertain any friendship or familiarity with God, though he was framed for that very end, and endued with faculties fitted to attain it, though he stands, and cannot but be sensible that he stands, in the utmost want of it; though he be invited and encouraged to it frequently and earnestly, by God himself: and though it be his chief honour, advantage, and happiness, as well as his duty, to comply with those invitations.

In all cases where the body is affected with

with pain or sickness, we are forward enough to look out for remedies; to listen greedily to every one that suggests them, and upon the least hopes of success, from the reports of others, immediately to apply them. And yet, notwithstanding that we find and feel our souls disordered and restless, tossed and disquieted by various passions, distracted between contrary ends and interests, ever seeking happiness in the enjoyments of this world, and ever missing what they seek; notwithstanding that we are assured from other men's experience, and from our own inward convictions, that the only way of regulating these disorders is, to call off our minds from too close an attention to the things of sense, and to employ them often in a sweet intercourse with our Maker, the author of our being, and fountain of all our ease and happiness: yet are we strangely backward to lay hold of this safe, this only method of cure. We go on, still nourishing the distemper under which we groan, and choose rather to feel the pain than to apply the remedy. Excellent, therefore, was the advice of Eliphaz to Job, when, in the midst of his great troubles and pressures, he thus bespoke him: *Acquaint thyself now with him* (i. e. with God), *and be at peace*. Take this opportunity of improving thy acquaintance with God, to which he always, but now especially, invites thee. Make the true use of those afflictions which his hand, mercifully severe, hath been pleased to lay upon thee; and be led by the means of them, though thou hast endeavoured to know and serve him already, to know and serve him still better, to desire and love him more. Calm the disorders of thy mind by reflections on his paternal goodness and tenderness, on the wisdom and equity, and absolute rectitude of all his proceedings: comfort thyself with such thoughts at all times, but chiefly at that time when all earthly comforts fail thee, then do thou particularly retreat to these considerations, and shelter thyself under them.—*Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace*.

The words, therefore, will suggest matter not unfit for our devout meditation, under the three following heads, wherein I shall consider,

I. What this scripture phrase of *acquainting ourselves with God* implies, and wherein the duty recommended by it particularly consists.

II. How reasonable, necessary, and desirable a duty it is, as on many other accounts, so especially on this, that it is the only true way towards attaining a perfect tranquillity and rest of mind,—*acquaint thyself with him, and be at peace*. Which will lead me also to shew, in the

III^d place, That the most proper season for such a religious exercise of our thoughts is, when any trouble or calamity overtakes us—*Acquaint thyself now with him*.

I. We are to consider what this scripture phrase of *acquainting ourselves with God* implies, and wherein the duty recommended by it particularly consists. The phrase itself occurs, I think, nowhere else in holy writ: however, the true meaning of it is very obvious and easy.

We are prone by nature to engage ourselves in too close and strict an acquaintance with the things of this world, which immediately and strongly strike our senses; with the business, the pleasures, and the amusements of it. We give ourselves up too greedily to the pursuit, and immerse ourselves too deeply in the enjoyment of them, and contract at last such an intimacy and familiarity with them, as makes it difficult and irksome for us to call off our minds to a better employment, and to think intensely on any thing besides them. To check and correct this ill tendency, it is requisite that we should *acquaint ourselves with God*; that we should frequently disengage our hearts from earthly pursuits, and fix them on divine things; that we should apply ourselves to study the blessed nature and perfections of God, and to procure lively and vigorous impressions of his perpetual presence with us, and inspection over us; that we should contemplate earnestly and reverently the works of nature and grace, by which he manifests himself to us—the inscrutable ways of his providence, and all the wonderful methods of his dealing with the sons of men. That we should inure ourselves to such thoughts, till they have worked

up our souls into that filial awe and love of him, that humble and implicit dependance upon him, which is the root and principle of all manner of goodness: till we have made our duty in this respect our pleasure, and can address ourselves to him, on all occasions, with readiness and delight; imparting all our wants, and expressing all our fears, and opening all our griefs to him, with that holy freedom and confidence to which the Saints and true servants of God are entitled, having *received the spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba Father!* In this sense ought we to *acquaint ourselves with God, to set him always before us, as the scripture elsewhere speaks; to draw near to him, and to delight in approaching him.*

But this is only a general account of what our *acquaintance with God* implies. It may be useful to mention some particulars also, wherein it chiefly consists; and to say somewhat distinctly upon each of them.

In order to begin and improve human friendships, five things are principally requisite—knowledge, access, a similitude of manners, an entire confidence, and love; and by these also the divine friendship, of which we are treating, must be cemented and upheld.

The first step towards an *acquaintance with God* is, a due knowledge of him. I mean not a speculative knowledge, built on abstracted reasonings about his nature and essence, such as philosophical minds often busy themselves in, without reaping from thence any advantage towards regulating their passions, or improving their manners: but I mean a practical knowledge of those attributes of his, which invite us nearly to approach him, and closely to unite ourselves to him; a thorough sense, and vital experience of his paternal care over us, and concern for us; of his unspotted holiness, his inflexible justice, his unerring wisdom, and his diffusive goodness; a representation of him to ourselves, under those affecting characters of a Creator and a Redeemer, an Observer and a Pattern, a Law-giver and a Judge, which are aptest to incline our wills, and to raise our affections towards him, and either to awe or allure us into a stricter performance of every branch of our duty. These, and the like moral and

relative perfections of the Deity, are most necessary and most easy to be understood by us: upon the least reflection and inquiry we cannot miss of them, though, the oftener and more attentively we consider them, the better and more perfectly still shall we know them.

The acquaintance, thus begun, cannot continue without frequent access to him: without *seeking his face continually* (as the good Psalmist's phrase is), in all the methods of spiritual address: in contemplation and prayer: in his word, and in his ordinances: in the public service of the sanctuary, and in the private devotions of the closet; and chiefly in the latter of these, which are, on several accounts, most useful towards promoting this holy correspondence. By these means, and in these duties, is he to be approached and found, and, notwithstanding our infinite distance, will *draw near to them who thus draw near to him*, and shew himself to be a God that is *at hand, and not afar off.*

But in vain shall we approach him, unless we endeavour to be like him. A similitude of nature and manners (in such a degree as we are capable of) must tie the holy knot, and rivet the friendship between us. Whomsoever we desire to approve, we labour also to conform ourselves to: to be not only almost, but altogether, such as they are, if it be possible; that so they seeing themselves in us, may like us for the sake of themselves, and go out (as it were) to meet and embrace their own image and resemblance. Would we then be admitted into an acquaintance with God, let us study to resemble him. We must be *partakers of a divine nature*, in order to partake of this high privilege and alliance! *For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?*

Yet farther, one essential ingredient in all true friendships is, a firm unshaken reliance on him who is our friend. Have we such towards God? Do we entirely trust in him? Do our souls lean on him, as a child that is weaned of his mother? Do we resign ourselves and our affairs absolutely to be disposed of by him; and think all our concerns safer in his hands than in our own; and resolve to believe every thing to be best and fittest for us, which

which he sees best should befall us? Are we still under his rod without a murmur; without despondency of mind, and without charging God foolishly? Do we unbosom all our secrets to him, and neither endeavour nor pretend to hide any thing that passeth in the depth of our hearts from him? Do we inquire of him for his advice and assistance in every thing; and hearken to what our Lord God shall say to us, either by the inward whispers of our consciences, or the outward ministry of his word, or the awakening calls of his providence; and give heed diligently to fulfil all the least intimations of his good pleasure, that are any ways made known to us? Then have we entered deep into, and advanced far in that holy intimacy which the text recommends. O well is it with us! Happy are we, and shall we be!

However, yet one thing more we lack to be perfect; love, which is the fulfilling of this law of friendship, the surest test, and most exalted improvement of it.

Let us consider, therefore, whether we do indeed love the Lord our God, with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength: whether our approaches to him are always sweet and refreshing; and we are uneasy and impatient under any long discontinuance of our conversation with him; and retire into our closet from the crowd, in order to meet him whom our soul loveth, with a pleasure far exceeding theirs, who chant to the sound of the viol, and are joyful in the strength of new wine: whether our hearts burn within us, at the perusal of his holy word; and the relish and savour of it upon our minds be such, as that, in comparison of it, all the most exquisite human compositions seem low and mean, flat and insipid to us: whether we have an even and overburning zeal for his honour and service, and are always contriving somewhat, and doing somewhat to promote his interest, without any immediate regard to our own: whether we delight to make mention of his name, and to make our boast in his praise, even among those who fear him not, and know him not, and to render our goodness and our devotion exemplary, in proportion to the vices and the irreligion of others. Finally, whether our love of life, and our complacency in the good things of it, slackens every day, and

even our dread of death is in some measure vanquished; and we do, whilst we are contemplating the joys of another state, almost desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ, and groan under those earthly clogs and bars that incumber and obstruct us in our flight towards him, and hinder our mind from exerting with freedom all its faculties and powers, on the supreme object of its desires, hopes, and endeavours. When we perceive ourselves to be, after this manner, rooted and grounded in love, and to abound in these genuine and blessed fruits of it; behold! then is our spirit advanced to the nearest degree of union with the great Father of spirits, of which it is capable on this side heaven; and we are indeed (according to what is said of faithful Abraham in holy writ) *the friends of God*.

Thus have I shewn you, what it is to acquaint ourselves with God, and wherein this acquaintance chiefly consists; to wit, in an intimate knowledge of him, a frequency of access to him, a conformity and likeness of temper and manners, an humble and implicit reliance upon him, and an ardent affection of soul towards him. I proceed now, in the

11d Place, to consider, how reasonable, desirable, and necessary a thing it is thus to acquaint ourselves with God, as on many other accounts, so particularly on this; that it is the only true way towards attaining a perfect tranquillity and rest of mind; *acquaint thyself with him, and be at peace*.

Honour, profit and pleasure are the three great idols to which the men of this world bow; and one, or all of which, is generally aimed at in every human friendship they make; and yet, though nothing can be more honourable, profitable, or pleasing to us than an acquaintance with God, we stand off from it, and will not be tempted even by these motives, though appearing to us with the utmost advantage, to embrace it.

Can any thing improve and purify and exalt our natures more than such a conversation as this, wherein our spirits, mounting on the wings of contemplation, faith, and love, ascend up to the first principle and cause of all things; see, admire, and taste his surpassing excellence, and feel the quickening power and influence of it, till we ourselves thus *with open face beholding, as in a glass, the glory*

of

of the Lord, are changed (gradually and insensibly changed) into the same image, from glory to glory, from one degree of perfection and likeness to another? What an honour is it to us that God should admit us into such a blessed participation of himself; that he should give us minds capable of such an intercourse with the supreme universal Mind? and shall we be capable of it without enjoying it?

In what conversation can we spend our thoughts and time more profitably than in this? To whom can we betake ourselves with greater expectations to succeed in our addresses? Upon whom can we rely with more security and confidence? Is he not our most munificent Benefactor, our wisest Counsellor, and most potent Protector and Friend; both able and willing to do every thing for us, that it becomes either us to ask, or him to grant? Are not the blessings both of this world and the next in his disposal? And is not his favour and good-will the only sure title that we can plead to them? And shall we spend our time, therefore, in cultivating useless and perishing acquaintances here below, to the neglecting that which is of the vastest concern to us, and upon which our everlasting welfare depends? Shall we not rather say with St. Peter, *Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.*

O the sweet contentment, the tranquillity, and profound rest of mind, that he enjoys, who is a friend of God, and to whom God, therefore, is a friend; who hath gotten loose from all meaner pursuits, and is regardless of all lower advantages that interfere with his great design of knowing and loving God, and being known and beloved by him; who lives as in his sight always, looks up to him in every step of his conduct, imitates him to the best of his power, believes him without doubt, and obeys him without reserve; desires to do nothing but what is agreeable to his will, and resolves to fear nothing beyond or beside his displeasure: in a word, who hath resigned all his passions and appetites to him, all his faculties and powers, and given up his soul to be possessed by him without a rival. Surely such an one hath within his breast, that divine *peace which passeth all understanding*; is inconceivable by those who are strangers to it, and inutterable even by those upon whom it

rests. In vain doth the scornful voluptuary ask for an account of it, which can never be given him; for it hath no alliance with any of the pleasures of sense, in which he delights; nor hath he any ideas by which the perception of it may be conveyed to him: it may make the prophet's challenge, and say, *To what will you liken me? and wherewithal will you compare me?* This peace is to be understood only by being enjoyed; and such an acquaintance with God as the text recommends, is the only means of enjoying it. But I hasten, in the

third and last place, to shew, That the most proper season for such a religious exercise of our thoughts, is, when any fore trouble or calamity overtakes us; *acquaint thyself now with him*, said Eli-phaz to Job; that is, now, when the wise Disposer of all things hath thought fit to pour out affliction upon thee; then that peace, or sweet calm and repose of mind, which the text mentions, is most needful for thee, and is always and only to be had from the same hand that wounded thee.

At such times our soul is most tender and susceptible of religious impressions, most apt to *seek God, to delight in approaching him*, and conversing with him, and to relish all the pleasures and advantages of such a spiritual commerce. The kind and chief design of God, in all his severest dispensations, is to melt and soften our hearts to such degrees, as he finds necessary, in order to the good purposes of his grace, and so to dispose and prepare them every way, as that they may become fit mansions for his holy Spirit to dwell in; to wean us gently and gradually from our complacency in earthly things, which we are too apt to rest in, though we are sure that we must one day part with them; to convince us of the vanity of all the satisfactions which this world affords, and to turn our thoughts and expectations towards the joys of another.

We are, by nature, indigent creatures, incapable of ourselves to content and satisfy ourselves; and therefore are ever looking abroad for somewhat to supply our defects and complete our happiness. To this end, our wills and affections run out after every seeming good here below; but return empty and unsatisfied always from the pursuit, and therefore cannot

but

but suggest to us the thought, and possess us with the desire, of some higher good, which is their only adequate object, and in which alone true joys are to be found. But we have the most feeling sense and experience of this truth, when the hand of God lies heavy upon us: then we plainly discern our own insufficiency and weakness, and yet see nothing about or near us that can afford us any real relief, and therefore we fly to him who only can, who is rich in mercies, and mighty to save; both able and willing to stretch himself out to all our wants, and to fill our emptiness. Even they, who in their prosperity forget God, do yet remember and turn to him when adversity befalls them. They who, whilst the course of things goes smoothly and happily on, and every passion of theirs is entertained, every wish is gratified, find no room for thoughts of this kind, but are so taken up with enjoying the blessings, as not to be at leisure to consider the great author and bestower of them; even these persons do, in the day of their distress, take refuge in reflections on the benignity and goodness of God, and begin then to think of him with some kind of pleasure (though allayed with doubts and fears), when they can with pleasure think of nothing besides him. How much more shall devout and blameless souls, which have never been strangers to these considerations, retreat to them, in an evil hour, with eagerness, and rest in them with the utmost satisfaction and delight? The acquaintance, which they stand in need of for their support, is not now first to be made: it has been contracted long ago, and wants only to be renewed, and applied to particular exigencies and occasions. Happy, extremely happy are they, who by the means of a virtuous temper, and a religious education, have been trained up in this acquaintance from their very youth: that season of our age, when the friendships we enter into are most sincere and true, most passionate and tender, most firm and durable: whilst our minds were as yet untainted with false principles and vicious customs, and had not drunk in that contagion from ill company, which indisposes us for better; had not made that friendship with the world, which is enmity with God. Behold, then was the day of

salvation: then was the accepted time, when God most valued the offer of our hearts, and we could give them up to him most easily and most entirely. And when once we have thus early and thoroughly devoted ourselves to God, there are no trials of our virtue and courage so sharp, no evils so great, but that we can sustain and bear them, for God is our hope and strength, a very present help in time of trouble: and therefore we resort to him on such occasions, with the utmost readiness and confidence, even as a son doth to a beloved and loving parent, or a friend to the friend of his bosom, casting all our care upon him, as knowing that he careth for us.

I have set God always before me (says good David): he is on my right hand, therefore I shall not fall. And having set God always before him, what wonder is it, if he found the special advantage of such a practice, in the time of his sufferings and sorrows? And therefore thus, in another place, professes of himself—*When I am in heaviness, I will think upon God.*

No man had ever studied the several arts of holy living with greater care than he: no man had more diligently practised them. His delight was in the law of God, and in that did he exercise himself, day and night. He took heed to his feet, and ordered all his steps aright, that he might run the way of God's commandments. And what at last was the great expedient he pitched upon to secure himself in a regular and uniform course of virtue? Even this—*To set God always before himself; to watch early and late; to remember him on his bed, and to think on him when he was waking.* He was the man after God's own heart, and this was the chief method by which he became so. It was this that enabled him to fulfil the public character of a religious, just, and merciful prince, and a father of his people; and that awed him in his retirements, when the eyes of men were far from him. It was this that gave life and wings to his devotions, that carried him through various difficulties and temptations, that supported him under all his troubles and afflictions.—*When I am in heaviness (said he) I will think upon God; when my heart is vexed, I will complain to him.*

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He might have thought on many other things, which are usually looked upon as reliefs to afflicted minds. He might have endeavoured to raise himself, by reflecting on the happy circumstances of his royal state, on his power and wealth, and worldly splendour; on the love and reverence that was paid him by his subjects; on *his fame, that was gone out into all lands, and on the fear of him that was fallen upon all nations*; on his potent and numerous alliances, his signal successes and triumphs. But he renounces all these weak and insufficient supports, and betakes himself to that which was worth them all, and which alone could administer true comfort to him—*When I am in heaviness, I will think upon God.*

And how can the pious sons and daughters of afflictions better employ themselves than in looking up to him that hath bruised them, and possessing their souls in patience, under the same thought with which this good prince quieted his griefs, *because it is thy hand, and thou, Lord, hast done it?* What comfort and composedness of mind must it afford them, to consider that these are the chastisements of a kind father, who means them for our good, and *doth not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men, but even in his wrath thinketh upon mercy; and will, with the temptation also, make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it?*

Let us imitate the pattern which this royal sufferer hath set us. Let us follow this excellent guide, by laying hold of the remedy which he found so successful in the day of visitation. Let us, throughout the whole course of our lives, take care to make the thoughts of God so present, familiar, and comfortable to us here, that we may not be afraid of appearing face to face before him hereafter. Let us so inure our minds to those faint views of him, which we can attain to in this life, that we may be found worthy to be admitted into the blessed vision of him in the next, when *in his presence there will be fulness of joy, and at his right hand pleasures for evermore.*

To Him, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, three persons and one God, be ascribed by us, and all men, all possible adoration and praise, might, majesty, and dominion, now and for evermore. Amen.

S E R M O N XIV.

The Fear of God a Motive to Holiness.

PHIL. ii. 12.

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

THE wise and good author of our nature foreseeing that, in this degenerate and corrupted state of it, the rules of duty he prescribed would not, without great difficulty and reluctance, be complied with, hath been graciously pleased to address himself, not to our reason only, but our passions also, and to enforce his commands by proposing, together with them, such motives and considerations as (he knew) would have the greatest influence towards determining our choice, towards securing and enlivening our christian obedience. And the most operative of these motives seems to be that which applies itself to our fears, and urges upon us the strict practice of virtue, by the threats of divine vengeance, which will certainly attend our disobedience. This consideration the sacred writers frequently inculcate, and particularly St. Paul, in the words of the text, wherein he exhorts the Philippians, to *work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.*

On which words I intend to build this plain but useful proposition: "That a fear of God's wrath, and of eternal punishment, is a proper and sufficient motive to lead men to holiness." This seems to be a very evident truth, and yet those who have to deal with scrupulous consciences know, that some very pious and well-meaning christians do, in good earnest, doubt of it, and will not allow themselves to be in a regenerate state, or to have a sure title to the divine favour, because their repentance wholly took its rise at the first, and hath since perhaps, in some measure, received its growth and increase from that base and slavish principle of fear, to which they imagine the true sons of adoption, and the elect of God, are always strangers.

To remove the scruples under which such good but mistaken men labour, shall be the business of my present discourse : wherein I shall endeavour,

(I.) First, By some general reflections, to lessen the ill opinion which these persons entertain of themselves :

(II.) And then proceed more directly to prove, that the principle from which their repentance and obedience hath sprung, is such as they may securely rely on. And,

I. I desire them to consider, that, although the gospel doth (almost in every page of it) represent to us the necessity of repentance in general ; yet, as to any particular motive, from whence this change of mind and manners must necessarily flow, it is altogether silent. Which seems to intimate this truth, that if a man be but sincerely and thoroughly good, it matters not much out of what principle he first became so ; else the scripture, which so often and earnestly presses upon us the one, would have laid some stress on the other also. It is said indeed, that we must *love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength* ; that we must *walk in all his ways, and keep all his commandments* (Luke, x. 27.) : but it is no where determined from what motive this our love and obedience must originally spring, in order to find acceptance with God. And, therefore, where no express directions are given, there the divine goodness seems to have indulged a latitude. And why then should we make the way that leads to eternal life narrower, and the gates straiter than God himself appears to have made it ? But,

2. It seems a little unequal and posterous in these persons to lay so great a stress on their fears in one respect, when they distrust them so much in another. For the state of their case is plainly this ; that by a dread of divine vengeance they were at first scared from the practice of vice, and led into the paths of virtue. And it is the same religious dread that now inclines them to suspect, and condemn themselves on that very account. They fear they have not repented in that manner they ought to have done, because their repentance was at first the effect of

their fear : that is, they allow the suggestions of his passion to have a great deal of weight in the latter case, but none at all in the former. Which is, at one and the same time, to pay too much and too little regard to it, and to *condemn ourselves* (as St. Paul elsewhere speaks) *in that thing we allow*. Rom. xiv. 22. And the judgments men pass on their own condition, from such inconsistent and confused views as these, must needs be very uncertain and unfit to be relied on. Nay,

3. It is no slight token of a man's being really and sincerely good, and upon such principles and grounds as are well-pleasing to God, in that he suspects himself not to be so ; since we rarely find any but the best and most religious minds entertaining such little doubts, and encouraging such nice scruples as these. The bold presumptuous sinner goes on hardily in his way, careless and fearless, without looking backward to the point from whence he set out, or forward to the end of his journey. *He repenteth not of his wickedness* (according to the description given of him by the prophet Jeremy), *saying, What have I done ? But turneth again to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle*. Jerem. xviii. 6. The hypocrite, on the other side, is as secure and well satisfied in his way, having acted his part so long as to come at last to think it real, and to deceive even his own heart as well as the eyes and observations of others, and contenting himself with a demure shew and face of religion, without any troublesome doubts or misgivings. But it is the good and conscientious man chiefly, that is uneasy and dissatisfied with himself ; always ready to condemn his own imperfections, and to suspect his own sincerity, upon the slightest occasions. He desires so much and earnestly to please God, that he can never think he pleases him as much as he ought to do. Every wry step, by which he imagines himself to have declined from the path of duty, affrights him when he reflects on it ; every the least obliquity in thought, word, and deed, seems considerable to him. So that these suspicions and godly jealousies do, I say, usually abound most there, where there is least need of them ; and it is (generally speaking) a very good sign of a man's loving God heartily, and in good earnest, when he begins to doubt whether he loves him or no, and suspects even

even the best fruits of holiness, which shine in his life and practice, because he cannot look back with satisfaction on the principle of fear, from whence they flowed. And therefore these very scruples and jealousies which he thus cherishes, concerning the goodness of his state, would really afford matter of sound comfort to him, if he had but skill and courage enough to make a right use of them.

In order to convince him of which truth, after premising these general reflections, I proceed now, as I proposed, more particularly and directly to prove,

III. "That a fear of God's wrath and of eternal punishment, is a proper and sufficient motive to lead men to holiness."

This will appear if we consider,

1. The passion itself, its rise, nature and use.

2. The natural apprehensions we have of God as a lawgiver, judge and avenger.

3. The depth of sin into which some men are plunged, and out of which nothing but motives of terror and astonishment can possibly raise them.

1. The passion of fear is natural to us, and was given us by God for our safety and convenience; to warn us of impending dangers, and to put us upon finding out proper ways for avoiding them. When therefore this passion imprints on our minds a lively sense of the punishment due to sin, of the displeasure of God, of the mighty and insupportable torments of hell; and doth from hence excite and quicken us into the practice of virtue; when it doth this, I say, it doth its duty, and serves the very end for which it was implanted in our natures. Every thing that God made is good; that is, there is some good use or other to which it may be put. And certainly our fears must then be of the greatest use to us, when they are turned upon their most proper and important object, *everlasting burnings*. Do we think they were designed to admonish us only of some slighter harms, which may reach our bodies or our fortunes? to keep us awake and alarmed in relation to the evils of this life alone, without extending to those of another, as certain as these, and far greater than these in degree and duration? We may as well imagine that

reason was given us merely as an help towards managing the little affairs of this present world to our advantage, without any regard to what is future; to make us wise and prudent in our short and momentary designs upon happiness, without assisting us in the discovery and pursuit of eternal felicity. Certainly, as man is a creature framed for religion, so every one of his faculties and affections was originally ordained to the same end that he himself was; and may therefore to that purpose be usefully, and is always most fitly employed. His fears, therefore, and his hopes, and all the other passions that belong to the reasonable nature, were given him as much for religious uses as his very soul and his being were. So that when the terrors of the Lord persuade men, a natural end is served by a natural passion; and, upon these terms, we may be sure the Author of our nature will not refuse our obedience.

2. This will farther appear, in the next place, from the natural apprehensions we have of God, when we consider him as the object of our duty and service. It is plain, that we do then represent him to ourselves as a lawgiver; that is, as one who prescribes a rule to our actions, and will punish the breach of it. We cannot conceive him as giving a law without a sanction, that is, without representing him at the same time to ourselves, as enforcing that law with a threat, and securing the observance of it by some penalty annexed. This is the method of all inferior legislators, and is from thence easily and naturally transferred by us to the Supreme. So that our first and most immediate conceptions of God, by which we are excited to our duty, involve in them this very motive we are so apt to suspect; and we cannot propose to ourselves the one, without feeling in some measure the power and force of the other.

To observe God's laws under a prospect of reward is what many of those who reject a principle of dread, will not deny to be a reasonable and sufficient inducement to virtue. Now, how our desiring a good should make what we do on that account acceptable in the eyes of God, and yet that very thing be unacceptable, when done to avoid an evil; how the hope of reward should be a good motive, and

and yet the fear of losing that reward be an ill one, is hard to determine. It is on each side, the selfishness of the principle, and the mixture of our own interest with it, that seems to lessen its worth. And I cannot see how our interest is less concerned in pursuing pleasure than in flying pain.

Indeed, the noblest and most commendable reason of our serving God is, our love of him. God is love, and he chiefly delights in those disinterested duties which spring from that principle. However, he hath been pleased to condescend to the weakness, nay to the baseness of our natures, and to accept our bounden duty and service upon much lower terms. He hath thought fit to allure and to frighten us into obedience; and him that comes even this way to him, he will in no wise cast out.

3. To strengthen this proof yet farther, let us, in the third place, take a view of the state and condition of profligate sinners. We shall find it to be such, that nothing but terror can any ways lay hold of them. Is it possible for a man that is sunk into all manner of vice and impurity; to be struck on a sudden with the beauty of virtue and goodness, with the love of God, and of his infinite perfections? Can he (do we think) recover himself, by reflecting on the deformity and turpitude of sin, on the dignity of his nature, and of that divine character and resemblance which he bears? Alas! let virtue be never so lovely, goodness never so desirable; yet he hath no eyes to see it, no heart to desire it. He hath lost the taste of every thing, but those very delights in which he indulges himself; and reason is no longer reason to him than it pleads for his enjoyments. Now what, I say, can possibly rouse such a creature as this, so lost to all ingenuous motives, but the sense of divine vengeance, and the dread of eternal punishments? The terrors of hell may still perhaps persuade him to consider (for fear will find an entrance where no other passion can); but to all arguments besides, he is perfectly impenetrable.

Indeed, after that the wrath of God hath terrified him into reflections on his wretched state, and into resolutions of quitting it, there is room for other motives to come in, and finish the work

thus begun; to improve his contrition, and raise his resentments, and build him up in the practice of all manner of holiness. But still the leading step towards repentance must, I say, proceed from his fear; which therefore is a sure foundation for all penitents to build on, unless we can suppose that God ever leaves men in sin, without affording them any one proper motive to stir them up to virtue; an opinion not easily to be entertained of infinite goodness!

Why then should the pious christian harbour any doubts of this kind in his breast? *O why should his soul be cast down, and his spirit disquieted within him?* Psalm xlii. 5. There is no room for despondency of mind in such a state as his; no reason why that dread of divine wrath, which frightened him at first into the ways of virtue, should continue to haunt and pursue him still, now he is far advanced in them. The only fears which will be prejudicial to him, and which he ought to dismiss, are those concerning the validity of his repentance. His other fears were agreeable to nature and reason, and to those methods which the divine wisdom hath thought fit to make use of for reclaiming sinners. To serve God out of love, and love only, without the least mixture or alloy of any baser principle, is the privilege of angels and blessed spirits who live in the presence of God. It will hereafter be the reward of our having lived as became the gospel; but it cannot be matter of strict duty to us now. Lower and less noble ends must influence us while we are in this state of imperfection, till *that which is perfect is come*, that *which is in part need not*, and cannot be done away (1 Cor. xiii. 10.); therefore, *why is his soul cast down, and why is his spirit disquieted within him?*

To all this perhaps the dejected christian, for whose sake I have entered on this argument, will reply, that the fear of eternal punishment is indeed a proper and sufficient motive to lead men to holiness, if it be such a fear of God's power and justice as is sweetly allayed and tempered by a sense of his goodness; that is, if it be an evangelic and filial fear, composed of an equal mixture of awe and delight, of love and reverence; for to such a fear as this the most eminent saints of God were no strangers, since they

serv'd the Lord with fear (as good David speaks), *and rejoic'd before him with reverence.*

But alas ! his is altogether a legal and a servile fear ; a fullen gloomy passion, without the least mixture of any thing joyous and delightful ; a mere dread of Omnipotence, armed with vengeance, which presents the rod to him, as lifted up, and makes him tremble at the sight of it, and forces him off towards his duty without and against inclination, merely as beasts of sacrifice are dragged to the horns of the altar. This is his wretched case ; no glimpse of light appears in any corner of his soul ; no comfortable reflections on the goodness and mercy of God shine inwardly upon him ; but the face of his mind is all covered with darkness, distrust, and horror. And how can the services that flow from such a temper as this be acceptable to that God who is all love and light, and is pleas'd only with a willing mind, and a cheerful giver ? This is the sad account which some men give of themselves without cause. To rectify it, let them consider,

(1.) Hath this principle, which they thus blame, done the work of a better ? Hath it made them charitable, humble, temperate, devout ? Hath it enabled them *to purify themselves from all spot and blemish*, and *to adorn the doctrine of their God and Saviour in all things* ? Tit. ii. 10. If it hath, they may put what odious names upon it, and dress it up in what frightful shapes they please ; but it is certainly such a principle as will bear the test ; and if they continue to be directed by it, will at last carry them to heaven. Be not deceived, *He that doth righteousness, is righteous* (1 John, iii. 7.) ; and as such shall receive a recompence at the great day of account, though he became so upon the lowest and least valuable considerations. The meanness of the motive which induced him to obey, shall not rob him of the rewards which are due to obedience. And therefore the distinction between a legal and servile fear is here mistaken and misapplied. For a servile fear (in the true notion of it) is such a dread of divine vengeance, as hath no saving influence upon men's lives and conversations, such as malefactors are seized with when under the sentence of execution, and without hopes of escaping

it ; such as ill men feel who go on obstinately in their ill courses notwithstanding it ; and such under which the devils themselves bow and tremble, though without altering in the least their diabolical natures by the means of it. But this is far from being the case of that man who *works out his own salvation with fear and trembling* ; and, therefore, we miscall such fears as these when we term them servile : for that is always in the accounts of right reason, and will be esteem'd in the sight of God, a true filial fear, which works by a true filial obedience. But,

(2.) It is farther probable, that these melancholy persons do represent their own inward sense of things worse than it deserves ; and persuade themselves into an opinion, that they love God less, and dread him more, than perhaps they really do. For (as I hinted at the beginning of this discourse) it is scarce conceivable that any men, who are not sincerely good, should disquiet themselves with such scruples about the ends and motives which inclined them to goodness. It is their fear of not loving God as much as they ought to do, which makes them apprehend that they do not love him at all. And, therefore, instead of turning their eyes inwardly upon the ideas which they have lodged in their frighted imagination, let them direct them upon the outward effects of their fears ; instead of puzzling themselves about the true principle of holiness, let them take a comfortable prospect of the genuine fruits of it, which abound in their life and practice ; and then their doubts will all disappear, their scruples will vanish ; and they will be satisfied, that the love of God hath that place which it ought to have in their hearts, inasmuch as they obey him : *For in this we know we love God, if we keep his commandments.* John, xiv. 15. But

(3. and lastly), Let the men who are under these apprehensions, make a right use of them ; not disturb and terrify themselves with such thoughts, but take occasion from thence to gain ground upon themselves, and to advance faster in the ways of religion ; and to excite in their hearts such a fervent and exalted love of God, as shall leave no room for any doubts and misgivings. It is true, that *perfect love casteth out fear* ; but such a degree of divine love is scarce attain-

able here: however, we may aspire and approach still nearer and nearer towards this perfection. How much soever we have conquered our dread of God, and improved our love of him, we may go on still to dread him less, and to love him more, till we come at last to be *rooted and grounded in love, and be able to comprehend, with all Saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.* Ephes. iii. 17, 18, 19.

To Him, together with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, &c.

S E R M O N XV.

The Terrors of Conscience.

ST. MATT. xiv. 1, 2, 3.

At that time Herod the Tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, and said unto his servants, this is John the Baptist, he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him. For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison, &c.

THE wicked (says the Prophet) are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. Isa. lvii. 20. That is, men of flagitious lives are subject to great uneasiness. Whatever calm and repose of mind they may seem for a season to enjoy, yet, anon a quick and pungent sense of guilt (awakened by some accident) rises like a whirlwind, ruffles and disquiets them throughout, and turns up to open view, from the very bottom of their consciences, all the filth and impurity which had settled itself there: a truth, of which there is not perhaps, in the whole book of God, a more apt and lively instance than that which the passage I have read from the Evangelist sets before us. The crying guilt of John the Baptist's blood sat but ill, no doubt, on the conscience of Herod, from the moment of his spilling it. However, his inward anguish and remorse was stifled and kept under for a time, by the splendour and luxury in which he lived, till he heard of the fame of Jesus, and then his heart smote him at the remembrance of the inhuman treatment he had given to such another just and good man, and wrung

from him a confession of what he felt, by what he uttered on that occasion: *He said unto his servants, this is John the Baptist! He is risen from the dead! And therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.* There could not be a wilder imagination than this, or which more betrayed the agony and confusion of thought under which he laboured. He had often heard John the Baptist preach, and must have known that the drift of all his sermons was, to prepare the Jews for the reception of a Prophet, *mightier than him, and whose shoes he was not worthy to bear.* Upon the arrival of that Prophet soon afterwards, Herod's frightened conscience gives him no leisure to recollect what his messenger had said, but immediately suggests to him, that this was the murdered Baptist himself! Herod, as appears from history, was, though circumcised, little better than an heathen in his principles and practices: or, if sincerely a Jew, was, at most, but of the sect of the Sadducees, who said, *there was no resurrection* (Mat. xxii. 23.); and yet, under the present pangs and terrors of his guilt, he imagines that *John was risen from the dead*, on purpose to reprove him. It was the Baptist's distinguishing character that he *did no miracles* (John, x. 41.), nor pretended to the power of doing them; and yet even from hence the disturbed mind of Herod concludes, that it must be he, because *mighty works did shew forth themselves in him.* And so great was his consternation and surprise, that it broke out before those who should least have been witnesses of it; for he whispers not his guilty fears to a bosom friend, to the partner of his crime and of his bed, but forgets his high state and character, and declares them to his very servants. Surely nothing can be more just and apposite than the allusion of the Prophet in respect to this wicked Tetrarch, he *is like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.* And such is every one that sins with an high hand against the clear light of his conscience: although he may resist the checks of it at first, yet he will be sure to feel the lashes and reproaches of it afterwards. The avenging principle within us will certainly do its duty, upon any eminent breach of ours, and make every flagrant

act of wickedness, even in this life, a punishment to itself.

With this general proposition the particular instance of the text (duly opened and considered) will furnish us; and this proposition, therefore, I now purpose, by God's blessing, to handle and enforce. And in order to fix a due, lively, and lasting sense of it upon our minds, I shall, in what follows, consider conscience, not as a mere intellectual light or informing faculty, a dictate of the practical understanding (as the phrase of the schools is), which directs, admonishes, and influences us in what we are to do; but as it acts back upon the soul, by a reflection on what we have done, and is, by that means, the source and cause of all that joy or dejection of mind, of those internal sensations (if I may so speak) of pleasure or pain, which attend the practice of great virtues or great vices, and begin that heaven and that hell in us here, which will be our sure and eternal portion hereafter. *The spirit* (or conscience) *of man is the candle of the Lord* (Prov. xx. 27.), which not only discovers to us, by its light, wherein our duty consists, but revives also, and cheers us with its bright beams, when we do well; and when we do ill, is as a burning flame, to scorch and consume us.

As such I shall consider it in my present discourse; wherein,

I. I shall endeavour to illustrate this plain but weighty truth (for indeed it needs illustration only, and not proof), by some considerations drawn from scripture, reason, and experience.

II. I shall account for a particular and pressing difficulty that seems to attend the proof of it. And,

III. Lastly, I shall apply it to (the proper object of all our admonitions from the pulpit, but most especially of this) the hearts and consciences of the hearers.

I. I am to illustrate this truth by some considerations drawn from scripture, reason, and experience.

That guilt and anguish are inseparable, and that the punishment of a man's sin begins always from himself, and from his own reflections, is a truth every where supposed, appealed to, and inculcated in scripture. The consequence of

the first sin that was ever committed in the world, is there said to have been, that our offending parents perceived their own nakedness, and fled from the presence of God: that is, a conscious shame and fear succeeded in the room of lost innocence, and the presages of their own minds, those *auguria penarum futurae* (of which even the heathen moralists speak), anticipated the sentence of divine vengeance. In relation to the office of conscience, it is, that the inspired writers speak of it (in terms borrowed from the awful solemnities of human judicatories) as *bearing witness against us, as accusing or excusing, judging and condemning us*. Rom. ii. 15. And the Prophet therefore adds this woe to the other menaces which he had denounced on a disobedient and profligate people, that *their own wickedness shall correct them, and their back-sliding shall reprove them*. Jer. ii. 19. A correction so severe and terrible, that Solomon balancing the outward afflictions of life and bodily pains, with the inward regrets and torments of a guilty mind, pronounces the former of these to be light and tolerable in comparison of the latter. *The spirit of a man* (says he) *will sustain his infirmities, but a wounded spirit can bear?* Prov. xvii. 14. Isaiah describes the dismal reflections and foreboding thoughts that harbour in such a breast after this manner: *The sinners of Sodom are afraid, fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites! Who shall dwell with devouring flames? Who shall dwell with everlasting burnings?* Isa. xxxiii. 14. But the part of scripture gives us so lively an account of this inward scene of dejection and horror as the psalms of penitent David. In one of them particularly he thus complains: *Mine iniquities are gone over my head, as an heavy burden; they are too heavy for me. I am feeble and sore broken, I have reared up reason of the disquietness of my heart. I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly: I am mourning all the day long. My panteth, my strength faileth me; and for the light of mine eyes, it is also from me. For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger; neither is there any in my bones, because of my sin.* xxxviii.

This is the expressive language of holy writ, when it would set out to us the disorders and uneasiness of a guilty, self-condemning mind. And,

2. There is nothing in these representations particular to the times and persons on which they point: nothing but what happens alike to all men in like cases, and is the genuine and necessary result of offending against the light of our consciences. Nor is it possible indeed, in the nature of the thing, that matters should be otherwise. It is the way in which guilt doth and must always operate. For moral evil can no more be committed, than natural evil can be suffered, without anguish and disquiet. Whatever doth violence to the plain dictates of our reason concerning virtue and vice, duty and sin, will as certainly discompose and afflict our thoughts, as a wound will raise a smart in the flesh that receives it. Good and evil, whether natural or moral, are but other words for pleasure and pain, delight and uneasiness. At least, though they may be distinguished in the notion, yet are they not to be separated in reality: but the one of them, wherever it is, will constantly and uniformly excite and produce the other. Pain and pleasure are the springs of all human actions, the great engines by which the wise Author of our natures governs and steers them to the purposes for which he ordained them. By these, annexed to the perception of good and evil, he inclines us powerfully to pursue the one, and to avoid the other; to pursue natural good, and to avoid natural evil, by delightful or uneasy sensations that immediately affect the body; to pursue moral good, and to avoid moral evil, by pleasing or painful impressions made on the mind. From hence it is that we so readily choose or refuse, do or forbear, every thing that is profitable or noxious to us, and requisite to preserve or perfect our beings. And because it is an end of far greater importance, and more worthy of our all-wise Creator's care, to secure the integrity of our moral, than of our natural perfections, therefore he hath made the pleasures and pains, subservient to this purpose, more extensive and durable; so that the inward complacency we find in acting reasonably and virtuously, and the disquiet

we feel from vicious choices and pursuits, is protracted beyond the acts themselves from whence it arose, and renewed often upon our souls by distant reflections; whereas the pleasures and pains attending the perceptions of natural good and evil, are bounded within a narrower compass, and do seldom stay long, or return with any force upon the mind, after a removal of the objects that occasioned them.

Hence then the satisfactions or stings of conscience severally arise. They are the sanctions, as it were, and enforcements of that eternal law of good and evil, to which we are subjected; the natural rewards and punishments originally annexed to the observance or breach of that law, by the great Promulger of it, and which being thus joined and twisted together by God, can scarce by any arts, endeavours, or practices of men, be put asunder. The Prophet therefore explains good and evil, by sweet and bitter. *Wo be to them (says he) that call evil good, and good evil! That put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!* Isaiah, v. 20. Implying, that the former of these do as naturally and sensibly affect the soul, as the latter do the palate, and leave as grateful or displeasing a relish behind them. But,

3. There is no need of arguments to evince this truth: the universal experience and feeling of mankind bears witness to it. For say, did ever any of you break the power of a darling lust, resist a pressing temptation, or perform any act of a conspicuous and distinguishing virtue, but that you found it soon turn to account to you? Did not your minds swell with a secret satisfaction, at the moment when you were doing it? And was not a reflection upon it afterwards always sweet and refreshing: *Health to your navel, and marrow to your bones?* Prov. iii. 8. On the contrary, did you ever indulge a criminal appetite, or allow yourselves sedately in any practice which you knew to be unlawful, but that you felt an inward struggle and strong reluctances of mind before the attempt, and bitter pangs of remorse attending it? Though no eye saw what you did, and you were sure that no mortal could discover it, did not shame and confusion secretly lay hold of you? Was not your own conscience instead of

a thousand witnesses to you? Did it not *plead with you face to face* (Ezek. xx. 35.), as it were, and upbraid you with your back-slidings? Have not some of you, perhaps at this instant, a sensible experience of the truth which I am pressing upon you? Do you not feel the operation of that powerful principle of which I am discoursing? Is not the memory of some of your past sins even now present to you? And are not your minds stung with some degree of that regret and uneasiness, which followed upon the first commission of them? And do you not discover what passes within you, by a more than ordinary attention, seriousness, and silence; and even by an endeavour to throw off these visible marks of concern into which you are surprised, as soon as they are observed?

The jolly and voluptuous livers, the men who set up for freedom of thought, and for disengaging themselves from the prejudices of education and superstitious opinions, may pretend to dispute this truth, and perhaps, in the gaiety of their hearts, may venture even to deride it: but they cannot, however, get rid of their inward convictions of it; they must feel it sometimes, though they will not own it. There is no possibility of reasoning ourselves out of our own experience, or of laughing down a principle woven so closely into the make and frame of our natures. Notwithstanding our endeavours to conceal and stifle it, it will break out sometimes, and discover itself, to a careful observer, through all our pretences and disguises, for even *in the midst of such a laughter the heart is sorrowful*; and as the beginning of that mirth was folly, so the end of it is always heaviness. Prov. xiii. 14.

Look upon one of these men, who would be thought to have made his ill practices and ill principles perfectly consistent, to have shaken off all regard to the dictates of his own mind, concerning good and evil, and to have gotten above the reproofs of his conscience, and you will find a thousand things in his actions and discourses testifying against him, that *he deceiveth himself*, and that *the truth is not in him*. John, i. 8. If he be indeed, as he pretends, at ease in his enjoyments, from whence come those disorders and unevenness in his life and con-

duct, those vicissitudes of good and bad humour, mirth and thoughtfulness; that perpetual pursuit of little, mean, insipid amusements; that restless desire of changing the scene, and the objects of his pleasures; those sudden eruptions of passion and rage upon the least disappointments? Certainly all is not right within, or else there would be a greater calm and serenity without. If his mind were not in an unnatural situation, and under contrary influences, it would not be thus tossed and disquieted. For what reason doth he contrive for himself such a chain and succession of entertainments, and take care to be delivered over from one folly, one diversion, to another, without intermission? Why, but because he dreads to leave any void spaces of life unfilled, lest conscience should find work for his mind at those intervals? He hath no way to fence against guilty reflections, but by stopping up all the avenues at which they might enter. Hence his strong addiction to company, his aversion to darkness and solitude, which recollect the thoughts, and turn the mind inwards upon itself, by shutting out external objects and impressions. It is not because the pleasures of society are always new and grateful to him, that he pursues them thus keenly, for they soon lose their relish, and grow flat and insipid by repetition. They are not his choice, but his refuge; for the truth is, he dares not long converse with himself, and with his own thoughts, and the world company in the world is better to him than that of a reproving conscience.

A lively and late proof of this we had in a certain writer, who set up for delivering men from these vain fantastic terrors, and was, on that account, for a season, much read and applauded. But it is plain that he could not work that effect in himself which he pretended to work in others; for his books manifestly shew, that his mind was over-run with gloomy and terrible ideas of dominion and power, and that he wrote in a perpetual fright against those very principles which he pretended to contradict and deride. And such as knew his conversation well, have assured us, that nothing was so dreadful to him as to be in the dark, and to give his natural fears an opportunity of recoiling upon him. That he was timorous to an excess is certain;

certain; he himself owns it, in the account which he wrote of himself, and which is in every one's hands: but he did not care to own the true reason of it, and therefore lays it upon a mighty fright which seized his mother, when the Spaniards attempted their famous invasion in the year 1588, the year in which he was born. The more probable account of it is, that it naturally sprung from his own conduct and method of thinking. He had been endeavouring, all his lifetime, to get rid of those religious principles, under which he was carefully educated by his father (a divine of the church of England), and to set up for a new system and sect which was to be built upon the ruins of all those truths that were then, and had ever been, held sacred by the best and wisest of men. It is vanity pushed him on to this attempt, but he could not compass it. He was able, here and there, to delude a superficial thinker with his new terms and reasonings; but the hardest task of all was, thoroughly to deceive himself. His understanding could not be completely imposed upon, even by its own artifices; and his conscience, every now and then, got the better of him in the struggle; so he lived in a perpetual suspicion and dread of the reality of those truths which he represented as figments; and while he made sport with that *kingdom of darkness* (as he loved to call another world), trembled in good earnest at the thought of it.

Tiberius, that complete pattern of wickedness and tyranny, had taken as much pains to conquer these fears as any man, and had as many helps and advantages towards it from great splendour and power, and a perpetual succession of new business and new pleasures; and yet, as great a master of the art of dissimulation as he was, he could not dissimble the inward sense of his guilt, nor prevent the open eruptions of it, upon very improper occasions—Witness that letter which he wrote to the senate, from his impure retreatment at Capræ. Tacitus has preserved the first lines of it, and there cannot be a livelier image of a mind filled with wild distraction and despair, than what they afford us. *Quid scribam, vobis P. C. aut quomodo scribam, aut quid omnino non scribam hoc tempore,*

dii me deæque peius perdant quam perire quotidie sentio, si scio. Annal. l. vi. p. 163. That is, “What, or how, at this time, I shall write to you, fathers of the senate, or what indeed I shall not write to you, may all the powers of heaven confound me yet worse than they have already done, if I know, or can imagine!” And his observation upon it is well worthy of ours, and very apposite to our present purpose: “In this manner,” says he, “was this emperor punished by a reflection on his own infamous life and guilt; nor was it in vain that the greatest master of wisdom (he means Plato) affirmed, that were the breast of tyrants once laid open to our view, we should see there nothing but ghastly wounds and bruises: the consciousness of their own cruelty, lewdness, and ill conduct, leaving as deep and bloody prints on their minds, as the strokes of the scourge do on the back of a slave. Tiberius (adds he) confessed as much, when he uttered these words; nor could his high station, or even privacy and retirement itself, hinder him from discovering to all the world the inward agonies and torments under which he laboured.” Thus that excellent historian.

Believe it, the tales of ghosts and spectres were not (as is commonly said) the mere inventions of designing men to keep weak minds in awe, nor the products only of a religious fear, degenerated into melancholy and superstition; but wicked men, haunted with a sense of their own guilt (as the cruel tetrarch here in the text with the Baptist's murder) were used to affright themselves with such phantoms as these, and often mistook strong and terrible imaginations for real apparitions. Thus, I am sure, the author of the Book of Wisdom very naturally accounts for them in his seventeenth chapter; out of which I shall recite a large passage, very apposite to the point which we are now handling. He is there with great elegance describing that panic fear which seized the impious Egyptians, when (as he speaks) “they were fettered with the bonds of a long night, and shut up in their houses the prisoners of darkness. Then (says he) they who had supposed, that they lay hid in their

“ secret sins, were horribly astonished
 “ and troubled with strange sights. For
 “ neither might the corner that held
 “ them keep them from fear, but noises,
 “ as of waters falling down, sounded
 “ about them, and sad visions appeared
 “ unto them with heavy countenances.
 “ And they that promised to drive away
 “ terrors and troubles from a sick soul
 “ (the men, we may suppose, who set up
 “ for confounding the notions of good
 “ and evil, and ridiculing conscience)
 “ were sick themselves of fear worthy to
 “ be laughed at. For though no terrible
 “ thing did affright them, yet being
 “ scared by beasts that passed by, and
 “ hissing of serpents, they died for fear,
 “ refusing to look upon the air, which
 “ on no side could be avoided. For
 “ wickedness (as he concludes), con-
 “ demned by its own witness, is very
 “ timorous; and being pressed with con-
 “ science, always forecasteth grievous
 “ things.”

I know it will be said, that though this be often, yet it is not always the case; since we have now and then instances of men, who lead very flagitious lives, and yet feel not any of these qualms or girds of conscience, but do, in all appearance, live easily, and sometimes even die calmly; which could not be (say the objectors) if the principle of conscience, and the condemning power of it, were natural to man; for it would then act like other natural principles, universally, and without exception. Having hitherto, therefore, illustrated this truth by observations drawn from scripture, reason, and experience, I proceed now on my

II^d General head, to account for this difficulty, which attends the proof of it. In order to it,

1. I observe, that we are deceived often in the judgments we pass on such occasions. In our common intercourse with the world, we see only the outside and surface, as it were, of men's actions, but cannot tell how it is with them inwardly, and at the bottom. We frame our opinions of them from what passes in conversation and public places, where they may be upon their guard, acting a part, and studying appearances. The hypocrite in perfection will put on the mask so artificially, that it shall seem to be real and natural. Decency, and a desire of esteem, shall enable men to co-

ver great passions and frailties, which nevertheless sit very close to them, and, as soon as those restraints are taken off, break out with freedom. We have read of those who have been endued with such a constancy and firmness of temper, as even to endure the rack, and to appear composed under the pains of it, without owning their crime, or declaring their accomplices. And in like manner, the torments of a guilty conscience may sometimes be borne and dissembled. I observe,

2. That the disorders and reprehensions of conscience are not a continued but an intermitting disease, returning upon the mind by fits, and at particular seasons only; in the intervals of which, the patient shall have seeming health and real ease. The eruptions of burning mountains are not perpetual, nor doth even the smoke itself ascend always from the tops of them; but though the seeds of fire lodged in their caverns may be stifled and suppressed for a time, yet anon they gather strength, and break out again with a rage great in proportion to its discontinuance. It is by accidents and occasions chiefly that the power of this principle is called forth into act; by a sudden ill turn of fortune, or a fit of sickness, or our observation of some remarkable instance of divine vengeance, which hath overtaken other men in like cases. Even Herod was not always under the paroxysm described in the text, but surprised into it unawares, by his *bearing of the same of Jesus*, and then his heart smote him at the remembrance of the inhuman treatment he had given to such another just and good person, and filled his mind anew with forgotten horrors. We cannot therefore, from a present calm of thought, know either how it hath been with a man heretofore, or how it shall be with him hereafter, but may easily, in such cases, and do often judge wrong judgment, saying, *peace, peace, where there is no peace*, but a truce only; and where it will appear that there was none, whenever affliction ruffles a man's soul, or a death-bed rouses him,

*Vera tum voces pectore ab imo
 Erumpunt, atque eripitur persona, manet res.*

Then (and sometimes not till then) all masks and disguises are thrown off, and the

the mind appears naked and unguarded to itself and others.

Ask those who attend the sick, and help to prepare them for their passage into another world: ask them, I say, and they will tell you, how many instances they have met with of men, who seem to have been given up to a spirit of insensibility and slumber, and have accordingly slept on for a long time, and *taken their rest*, and yet have, in their last moments, been all at once sufficiently awakened: what inexpressible agonies and horrors they have found upon the minds of dying, despairing sinners, who thought themselves secure against such attacks, and believed that the clamorous principle within them was wholly silenced; but upon the near prospect of another world, and which made no impression on them at a distance, have changed their sentiments, and dropped their false confidence; have seen their guilt, and dreaded their danger, when it was too late perhaps to think of deploring the one, or escaping the other.

After all, it must be owned,

3. That there are now and then instances of men who have gone through even this last trial unshaken, and after leading very dissolute lives, have yet died hard, as the phrase is, without any seeming concern for what was passed, or dread of what was to follow. Whenever such an effect happens, it is owing to one or more of these causes: either to ill principles, early and deeply imbibed, or to a certain obstinacy and fullness of temper peculiar to some men, or, lastly, either to a natural or acquired stupidity. If a man begins betimes with himself, and takes pains to vitiate his mind with lewd principles, and lives long in the profession of them, he may at last root and rivet them so fast, till scarce any application whatsoever is able to loosen them, and till the natural sentiments of his conscience are even choked and stifled by the means of them.

A false firmness and resolution, joined with the shame of unsaying and undoing all a man hath said and done before, may possibly carry him headlong on to his death, without owning, or perhaps even seeing, his danger. Gross and heavy minds, unimproved by education and instruction, have at length arrived at such a degree of stupidity, as to think

of nothing beyond this world, nor of any thing in it, but what immediately affects their senses. And even spirits more refined may, by a perpetual and total immersion in bodily pleasures, arrive at last at the same degree of insensibility. In such cases, and by the help of such qualities as these, it is possible, I grant, and sometimes happens, that men have gone out of the world as they lived in it, defying conscience, and the power of it, and deriding the flames of hell, till they were in the midst of them. But these are rare instances, and of no force therefore when opposed to the general conviction and feeling of mankind upon the same occasions. They prove only that there are monsters in the moral as well as the natural world, which make nothing against the settled laws and regular course of either. To argue against the innate and pungent reflections of conscience from some men's want of them, is as if one should attempt to prove, that man is not a reasonable creature, because some men are born naturals, and others, by too great an intention of thought, or by brutal excesses, have lost the use of their reason. For if the light of reason may itself be extinguished, much more may the voice of conscience be drowned, which, being a practical principle, is perpetually warred upon by our lusts and passions, and sinful habits; whereas the other, being a mere speculative power, hath no contrary in the mind of man to struggle with.

But I forbear, since there remains yet the

(III.) Third and last part of my task, to apply what hath been said to the proper object of all our admonitions from the pulpit (and particularly of this), the hearts and consciences of the hearers. Since therefore the wise Author of our natures hath so contrived them, that guilt is naturally, and almost necessarily attended with trouble and uneasiness, let us even from hence be persuaded to preserve the purity, that we may preserve the peace and tranquillity, of our minds. For pleasure's sake, let us abstain from all criminal pleasures and pollutions, because the racking pains of guilt, duly awakened, are really an overbalance to the greatest sensual gratifications. The charms of vice (how tempting

tempting soever they may seem to be) are by no means equivalent to the inward remorse and trouble, and the tormenting reflections which attend it, which always keep pace with our guilt, and are proportioned to the greatness and daringness of our crimes: for *mighty sinners* (here as well as hereafter) *shall be mightily tormented*. Wisd. vi. 6. Sins of omission, infirmity, and surprise, there will be; even the just man falls *seven times a day* by them, and rises again from them with strength and cheerfulness to his duty. But let us be sure carefully to guard against all such flagrant enormities as do violence to the first and plainest dictates of our reason, and overhear the strongest impulses of our conscience; for these will certainly leave a wound behind them, which we shall find it hard to bear, and harder, much harder, to cure. Let no temptation, no interest, no influence whatsoever sway us to do any thing contrary to the suggestions of conscience in plain cases, and points of moment. Let us no more dare to do in private what that tells us ought not to be done, than if we were upon an open theatre, and the eyes of the whole creation were upon us. What signifies it that we escape the view and observation of men, when the watchful witness within sees and records all our faults, and will certainly one day reprove us, and set our misdeeds in order before us?

It hath been reckoned a good rule for an happy conduct of life, to be sure of keeping our domestic concerns right, and of being easy under our own roof, where we may find an agreeable retreat and shelter from any disappointments we meet with in the great scene of vexation, the world. And the same rule will, with greater reason, hold in relation to the peace of our consciences. Let our first care be, to keep all quiet and serene there. When this point is once gained at home, external accidents will not be able deeply to affect us; and unless it be gained, all the pleasures, the abundance and pomp of life, will be insipid and tasteless to us.

Wherefore let us resolve, all of us, to stick to that principle which will keep us easy when we are alone, and will stick to us in an hour when all outward comforts fail us. Let those of us particu-

larly cherish it, who are in any degree placed above the rest of our neighbours by a superiority of parts, power, riches, or any other outward distinctions. Let those chiefly listen to this reprover, who are otherwise set in great measure above reproof. The more destitute they are of advice and correction from others, the more careful should they be to attend to the suggestions and whispers of this inward monitor and friend. Though they value not the censures passed by the vulgar on their actions, yet surely they cannot slight their own: nor do they stoop beneath themselves, when they stoop to themselves only, and to the inward dictates and persuasions of their own minds. The marks of distinction they bear, though they may enable them sometimes to sin with impunity as to men, yet will they not secure them against the lashes of an avenging conscience, which will find them out in their most secret retirements, cannot be forbid access, nor dismissed without being heard: will make their way to them, as they did to Herod and Tiberius, through business or pleasure, nay even through guards and crowds, and all the vain forms and ceremonies with which they may be surrounded.

In a word, let us *keep innocency, and do the thing which is right*; for, whatever other expedients towards happiness men may take up with, yet *that, and that only, will bring us peace at the last*. Psalm xxxvii. 37.

SERMON XVI.

Several useful Observations on St. Paul's Defence of himself before Felix.

ACTS, xxiv. Part of Verse 25.

And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled.

WHO that hears these words would not wish to have been present at this astonishing scene, which represents the Apostle of the Gentiles giving an account of his faith to Felix, the Roman governor, in so moving and convincing a manner, with such a force of eloquence and strength of argument, that even he, before

before whom he stands capitally accused, is struck, awed, confounded by his discourse, and the judge himself quakes at the voice of the prisoner! *As he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come* (says the text), *Felix trembled!*

The words will furnish us with very instructive and useful reflections, if we take occasion from them distinctly to consider,

I. The subject matter of St. Paul's discourse, *righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.*

II. His manner of handling it—he *reasoned.*

III. The remarkable effect that followed upon his thus handling this important subject—*Felix trembled.*

I. The subject matter of St. Paul's discourse is said to have been, *righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.*

Not that we are to imagine, that the apostle confined himself solely to the three particulars here mentioned, without touching on any other point of christian doctrine. Doubtless he declared to Felix the whole counsel of God in the redemption of man by Christ Jesus, and insisted particularly on the great article of Christ's resurrection in this sermon, as he did in many others: for the words immediately preceding those of the text are, that *Felix sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ*; and therefore all the articles of the christian faith were, we may be sure, sufficiently explained by him. However, though many other doctrines were at that time handled by the apostle, yet these of *righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come*, had so large a share in his discourse, were so warmly, so effectually urged by him, that St. Luke hath not thought fit to take notice of any other part of his sermon. From whence we are naturally led to raise this plain, but profitable observation, that the moral duties we are to practise in this life, and the rewards or punishments we are to expect in another, are the chief considerations in religion which should most often and earnestly be inculcated by those who preach the gospel, and be most attentively listened to and weighed by those who hear it.

Some persons have a prejudice against what is, by way of reproach, called moral preaching, and moral arguing. When the nature of good and evil, virtue and vice, are insisted on, and the several consequences displayed, which, by the light of reason, are known to attend them, this, they think, is not to preach Jesus Christ and his gospel; it is not to speak spiritually, feelingly, powerfully to the hearts and consciences of men: but St. Paul, it seems, was not of this mind, when he made justice and temperance, and a future account, the chief subject of his sermon before Felix; when he argued (as his manner of preaching upon other occasions shews that he did) from principles of natural light, how great reason men had to practise the two first of these, and to believe and expect the latter; when he enlarged upon the intrinsic beauty and loveliness of those virtues, and their manifest subserviency to men's present and future happiness, and urged the universal consent of mankind to this purpose, who had always acknowledged themselves to be under these obligations; and accordingly as they did or did not fulfil them here, liable to be rewarded or punished hereafter. St. Paul, we may be sure, thought himself all this while to be preaching Jesus Christ and his gospel; and from the effect we learn, that this moral preaching of the apostle was sufficiently powerful, awakening, edifying: for it had such a spiritual efficacy in it, as to make his auditor tremble.

But the subject matter of St. Paul's discourse is not more observable on the account of its excellence and importance at large, than it is for the particular fitness and propriety of it, with regard to the person to whom it was addressed. The two vices of which Felix was most remarkably guilty were, injustice and intemperance, as historians of unsuspected credit, both heathen and Jewish, inform us. Tacitus says of him, that *Judææ impositus, & cuncta malefacta sibi impune [cessura] ratus, tantâ potentiâ subnixo—per omnem sævitiam ac libidinem jus regium servili ingenio exercuit: i. e.* The impunity which he promised himself from his high station and power, tempted him to commit all manner of lust and violence: and Josephus adds, that Drusilla herself, who now sat with him

him on the judgment-seat, was really the wife of a certain king of the Eme-fenes, but had been enticed from his bed by Felix, with whom she now publicly lived and conversed. Nothing therefore could be more apposite than a discourse concerning righteousness and temperance, before such a cruel and voluptuous person; nothing more proper than to put this unjust judge in mind of another, a more impartial and dreadful tribunal, before which he himself should one day stand and be judged. Thus did St. Paul adapt and proportion what he spake to the peculiar wants and exigencies of the hearer, and in so doing, left us a pattern worthy of imitation; such as, when attentively considered, will give us great occasion to admire the dexterity and address, the sincere and disinterested conduct, the mighty courage and zeal of this eminent apostle.

What could have more of holy art and wisdom in it, than St. Paul's answering the inquiries of Felix in such a manner as was most likely to benefit the inquirer? The Roman governor, led by no other principle than curiosity, desires from St. Paul an account of his faith. St. Paul readily complies, and so orders that account, as to set those parts of christianity in the clearest light before Felix, which he wanted most to see and consider; so as to turn off his general apology for the gospel into an immediate and close application of some of its chief doctrines to the particular case of Felix, and to shew him, ere he is aware, that the laws both of christianity and nature agree in condemning his violences and impurities.

What a sincere and disinterested spirit does there appear in St. Paul on this occasion! He stood there accused of heinous crimes, and was ready to sink under the malice and mighty power of his accusers, the high-priest, and chief men of the Jewish sanhedrim then present, and soliciting a severe sentence against him. And yet he seems regardless of the imminent peril he was in, and forgetting his own private interest, any degree of concern for himself, turns all his thoughts, and bends his whole force, towards promoting the general interests of the gospel, and the salvation of souls. He contrives not how he may gain the affections of his judge, and

make him favourable to his cause, but how only he may induce him to be kind to himself and a good christian; how he may render him fit to receive mercy and favour from the Supreme Judge of heaven and earth. What is, if this be not, to preach the gospel of Christ in *simplicity and godly sincerity*?

Lastly, we may observe also, in the behaviour of St. Paul, the marks of an undaunted and exemplary courage. He fears not, we see, to utter necessary, though harsh and ungrateful truths in the ears of one who had the power of life and death over him. He knew with what dangers the faithful discharge of his duty would, in this case, be attended; how impatient the great are under reproof, though couched in the most gentle and least offensive language; what absolute empire Drusilla had gained over the heart of Felix, and with what revengefulness that impure woman would be sure to pursue any one who should venture to represent his guilt to him, and to rouse his sleeping conscience: and yet none of these frightening considerations were able to repress his godly zeal, or to check his freedom, which he conducted indeed with great caution and prudence, insinuating his reproofs under the cover of some evangelical doctrines, then proposed by him, however, with so great force and success, as to strike confusion and terror into the person for whom they were intended.

Let us copy the excellent pattern which this apostle hath set us, by taking all proper opportunities of spreading the kingdom of Christ in the hearts of men, and of advancing the interests of his gospel. Let us resolve always to do our duty, and discharge a good conscience faithfully, without being deterred by possible inconveniences or dangers that may attend us for so doing; without suffering secular views, and our own private interests, to divert us from pursuing any good design, whereby we may reasonably hope to promote the divine glory, and the good of mankind. Let us act in such cases discreetly indeed, warily, wisely, but withal courageously, zealously, firmly; as disregarding the fear of man, when it comes in competition with the fear of God. These (I say) are the intimations, these the instructions given us by the behaviour of St.

St. Paul, when, before an oppressive, a dissolute, and an unbelieving magistrate, he took an occasion to discourse of *righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come*.

In which discourse of his,

II. The second thing observable is, his manner of handling these subjects—he *reasoned*: that is, he treated of them in a rational way, proving, from the nature and tendency of those virtues, our obligation to practise them; and inferring, from those obligations, the certainty and necessity of a future account, wherein notice should be taken how we have or have not complied with them, and we should be rewarded or punished accordingly. And can any thing be said more to the advantage of a rational way of evincing the doctrines of morality, and the truths of the gospel, than that St. Paul practised it? He practised it, not on this only, but on many other occasions. In his several apologies for himself and for his gospel, recorded in the Acts, throughout his epistles sent to the several churches he planted, we find this great apostle of the gentiles continually reasoning; not merely proposing doctrines in an authoritative manner, by virtue of his apostleship and commission from God, but proving and making good what he proposes by inference and argument. Thus he frequently did, and by so doing has sanctified reason to the purposes of religion, and shewed us that one sort (indeed the best sort) of good preaching, consists in good arguing.

Some pious and well-meaning christians have a very wrong notion concerning edifying discourses, and profiting by sermons. They relish nothing from the pulpit but what is addressed to their passions, and set out with all the advantages of a popular eloquence and moving delivery. By this means, they find themselves inwardly affected and warmed; and that heating of their fancy they esteem and call spiritual edification. But when any point of doctrine is handled in a close and argumentative manner, it appears flat and unfavourable to them, has nothing in it of the life and power of godliness, and is all mere human reasoning. But herein they are widely mistaken; for it is a far greater and more useful work to inform the understandings, and convince

the judgments of men, than to raise their passions; and that discourse, which is most instructive, and best supported by reason, is certainly, if men attend to it as they ought, most edifying too. A vehement and voluble tongue, a languishing tone of voice, a pious set of phrases, or the like, will very powerfully move the affections of some sort of hearers; but the warmth by that means raised, is momentary and vanishing, without any true, sound, lasting, spiritual improvement. To compass that, the way we find which the mighty and successful preacher St. Paul took, was to reason. Though he were divinely inspired, and spake therefore as the oracles of God with an uncontrollable authority; though he were endued with supernatural powers, and could therefore have confirmed the truth of what he uttered by miracles; yet in compliance with the way in which human nature and reasonable creatures are usually wrought upon, he reasoned. But these reflections have been in some degree anticipated; and therefore, without enlarging farther upon them, I hasten to consider the

(III.) Third and last thing observable in the text, the wonderful effect that followed upon St. Paul's thus reasoning on these important subjects—*Felix trembled*. His mind was filled with horror at the remembrance of his past crimes, and the apprehension of a future reckoning; and these inward fears and forebodings appeared in the outward and visible marks of a great consternation.

Though he was one of the mightiest men on earth, and Paul a poor despised prisoner; though he was then sitting on the seat of judgment, where it behoved him to do nothing that misbecame his high place and character; yet could he not dissemble the pangs and agonies of his uneasy mind—he trembled!

From whence it is natural to observe the great force and efficacy of the word of God, duly handled and applied: *it is* (according to the account of it given by this very apostle in another place) *quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* Heb. iv. 12. There is no sin so secret, but that it will find it out and expose

pose it; no heart so hard, but that it can soften it; no conscience so far plunged in a lethargic sleep, but that it is able to rouse it. Strange are the instances of this kind recorded in holy writ. Our Lord opens the prophecies, and expounds the scriptures concerning himself, to the two disciples travelling towards Emmaus; and while he is doing it, *their hearts burn within them*. Luke, xxiv. 13. Philip points out to the eunuch the meaning of a chapter in Isaiah: immediately light and conviction rush in upon his mind, he confesses Jesus, and demands baptism. Acts, viii. 35. St. Peter preaches the gospel to a great multitude of the Jews, who had just before been instrumental in the crucifixion of Christ: they no sooner hear him than they are *pricked to the heart*, and cry out, *Men and brethren, what shall we do?* Acts, ii. 37. And straightway there are *added to the faith* no less than three thousand souls by this single sermon. And here, in the text, while St. Paul is *reasoning of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come*, Felix trembles. Acts, ii. 41. Such is the wonderful power of truth, when particularly blessed by the God of truth, and bid to go forth and prosper! Such is the great and astonishing influence of the word of God, when assisted and enlivened by his Spirit! It prevails over all difficulties, all opposition, and is *mighty to the pulling down of strong holds*. 2 Cor. x. 4. Remarkable to this effect is the different success of Tertullus's and St. Paul's pleading. Tertullus, we may presume, was one of the most famous pleaders of his time, else the high-priest and elders, in a cause of such consequence (which they themselves went from Jerusalem to Cæsarea on purpose to prosecute), would not have pitched upon him for their advocate; and yet this great orator, with all his studied art and eloquence, made no impression on Felix, whereas St. Paul's speech soon afterwards moved, terrified, confounded him. The reason of which different effect seems to have been, that the one was with good words to varnish over an ill cause, and by the power of oratory to support a false and lying accusation; whereas the other had right and truth of his side, and therefore pressed them earnestly. He himself felt what he spake, had an inward and vital

sense of those truths he delivered, and therefore he made others feel them too: he spake from his own heart, and to the hearts and consciences of those that heard him, and therefore he prevailed.

How should this instance, of the operative virtue of God's word reproach our sluggishness and insensibility? An impure and wicked heathen (we hear) trembled at St. Paul's doctrine. The same doctrine sounds every day in the ears of negligent christians, without terrifying, without alarming them. The same apostle still reasons with them in his epistles *concerning righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come*: but he reasons to no purpose, his words seem to them as idle tales; they neither feel their force, nor regard their meaning. Surely for this Felix shall one day rise up in judgment against them, for he heard and trembled!

I observe (secondly), that though Felix shewed great concern on that occasion, yet Drusilla, the partner of his crimes, did, for aught appears, sit by, altogether unmoved with the apostle's discourse. The most probable account of which seems to be this, that she, being born and bred a Jewess, had better opportunities of knowing the will of God, and her own duty, and greater obligations to practise what she knew, than those who were guided only by the light of nature and reason. And yet, notwithstanding the mighty restraints which her religion laid upon her, she had forsaken her marriage vows, and gone from the bed of her husband, who was circumcised, into that of an uncircumcised heathen: for which reason her guilt was of a much deeper dye than that of Felix was, and consequently her heart more obdurate and insensible of reproof. From whence we may raise to ourselves this general and useful reflection, that the more advantages any man has towards discovering the truth, and the more freely the means of grace have been indulged to him, the more desperate is his case if he happens to revolt, and the harder will the task be, if he turns profligate, to reclaim him. It is a work of much less difficulty to make a good christian of a professed heathen, than to bring an ill christian, who now lives like an heathen, to a feeling sense of his sins, and to any degree of true remorse and

and compunction of heart for them. Let us hear the issue of the whole matter—What the consequences of these tremblings of Felix was, and how long they continued upon him, the context will inform us. He abruptly breaks off the discourse with St. Paul, and dismisses him in haste: *Go thy way* (says he) *for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee!* But he soon recovers from his fright, for it presently follows—he *hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him; wherefore he sent for him the oftner, and communed with him.* We see the seed of the word, sown by the apostle, fell among thorns, and immediately the thorns sprung up, and choked it. Matt. xiii. 7. The love of unjust and oppressive gain quickly returned upon Felix, and drove out the impressions of St. Paul's reasonings; and when he had once stood the shock of his conscience, and got the better of his fears, he afterwards heard the same things said, without any degree of the same remorse and concern. *He sent for St. Paul often, and communed with him,* with no other design but that of gratifying his curiosity, and extorting a bribe from him: so suddenly and easily may the best reflections be stifled, and the strongest convictions overborn by the force of any one prevailing vice or lust that hath gotten an absolute dominion over us!

That this may not be our case, whenever we hear an awakening discourse from the pulpit, and find our consciences touched to the quick with some apposite passages of it, let us not forthwith endeavour to get rid of the smart, and to dismiss such troublesome reflections, as Felix did—*Go your way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for you.* Nay, but this is the proper time, this the most convenient season for our entertaining them, and conversing with them, when they press to be admitted and heard. Take not therefore something, as the way is, to put off the fit: call not in company, business, or pleasure, to divert your thoughts from their present melancholy employment, but rather study every way to cherish and promote these good beginnings by retirement, meditation, and prayer! *Commune with your own heart*

in your chamber, and be still there. Psalm iv. 11. Suffer these terrors of the Lord freely to reason and plead with you, till they have persuaded you there in private. Reapply and enforce and improve those good impressions you received in public, till you have rivetted the influence of them fast into your mind, and reached the end for which the good spirit of God intended them, even till (by the means of them) you have wrought out a repentance to salvation not to be repented of! 2 Cor. vii. 10.

Which that all of us may attain, God of his infinite mercy grant, through the merits of Christ our Saviour, to whom, with the Father and the blessed Spirit, be ascribed all power and praise, now and for ever!

S E R M O N XVII.

The Cross of Christ the only Thing we ought to glory in, and the proper Methods of glorying in it.

GAL. VI. 14.

But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereby the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

GOD forbid! A manner of speech familiar, and almost peculiar to St. Paul; frequently employed by him in his writings, thrice in this very epistle; never but where he intends, with a particular degree of earnestness and vehemence, to condemn some doctrine or practice imputed to christians, or prevailing among them, by which he thought christianity highly dishonoured. In such cases it is usual with him to express his dislike, his detestation of such doctrine or practice, by this emphatical phrase, *μη γένοιτο*, which we translate, *God forbid!*

The special occasion of his employing it here in the text was this: The gentile converts among the Galatians, after St. Paul's departure from them, had been seduced by some false teachers, who were Jews, into a belief that the law of Moses was not entirely abolished, but that circumcision, and the other rites of it, were still necessary to be

be observed by all those who, being heathens, intended to become christians. This opinion had been entertained, and spread, by these false teachers, partly through a superstitious reverence for their law, and a mistaken notion of the true nature and design of the gospel, and partly with a view of lessening the prejudices which the Jews had conceived against the doctrine of Christ, and of avoiding the persecutions which they every where raised against those who propagated or professed it.

The apostle having argued against these teachers and their opinions strongly and fervently, in various parts of this epistle, returns to the same subject at the close of it, and there sums up in short what he had before more largely delivered. *As many (says he) as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh* [*ἐνσαρκωμένοις ἰν σαρκί*, a phrase of his own, which signifies, to act upon carnal views, and for worldly ends, and to study popular and plausible appearances], *they constrain you to be circumcised, only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.* [Not so much out of a conviction of the necessity of what they urge upon you, as that they may live easily, and carry things smoothly with all men] For, as it follows, *neither they [these false teachers] themselves, who are circumcised, keep the law, but desire to have you circumcised,—To what end? Even that they may glory in your flesh; that they may boast of having made you proselytes to Judaism, in the way to christianity, and by that means recommend themselves to their countrymen on the account of their zeal for the law of Moses, at the same time that they would be thought to serve the interests of the gospel. But, let them consult their own safety, and affect a false glory by this insincere conduct, if they please, God forbid (says he) that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ! God forbid that I should act upon any such worldly views and motives in the propagation of the doctrine of Christ, or think to promote it by any methods but what are agreeable to the nature and design of it: it is the doctrine of the cross, and ought therefore to be preached in simplicity and godly sincerity, without worldly hopes or fears, without arts and disguises. The chief*

article of this doctrine, that wherein the great lines of it centre, is the satisfaction made to divine justice by the sufferings and death of a crucified Saviour. By this sacrifice of the cross, all the legal sacrifices and ceremonies are determined and abolished; by this, and this only, a real atonement is made to God for our sins, and a way opened to his favour: on this, consequently, all the hopes and happiness of a christian depend. Mean therefore and ignominious as the circumstances of this transaction were, I will not be offended at them myself, nor fear lest others should be offended. On this subject I will perpetually dwell in my private meditations, and in my public instructions: of this capital article of the christian faith I will not only not be ashamed, but I will boast: I will glory in it, and in nothing beyond or besides it, for it is a doctrine full of wonder and delight, of instruction, advantage, and comfort to sincere believers, to penitent sinners, since it is that *whereby the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. Whereby the world is crucified unto me: all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life,* is rendered, though not incapable of polluting me, yet ineffectual towards condemning me: the sting of sin is taken away, the guilt is pardoned, and *I am crucified unto the world: I am, by the victorious power of that grace, which was purchased by this sacrifice of the cross, become insensible and dead as it were to the pleasures, the pomps, and vanities of this world: I have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.* Gal. v. 24. Since therefore the sufferings of Christ are of so great efficacy and power, as to be able to free me, not only from the guilt and punishment of sin, but also from the dominion and power of it, is there any thing I should value myself upon in comparison of the privilege of being made a partaker of the merits of these sufferings? In comparison of the mercies, the advantages I enjoy by the means of this humble, but admirable dispensation? Let others form to themselves what schemes of satisfaction and happiness, pride themselves in what pre-eminences, what distinctions they please, *But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

Christ, whereby the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world!

I have largely explained the connection, and thereby opened the meaning of these words of St. Paul. The use I intend to make of them is, from thence to shew,

I. That whatever excellencies, outward advantages or privileges, it may be our lot to enjoy, yet it misbecomes us, as we are christians, to glory in them: but that,

II. It highly becomes us to glory in the cross of Christ.

III. By what methods, and in opposition to what enemies of the cross of Christ, we are obliged to glory in it. Of these three points in their order, as far as the time will permit.

I. And First, I am to shew, that whatever excellencies, outward advantages or privileges, it may be our lot to enjoy, yet it misbecomes us, as we are christians, to glory in them.

I do not say that we are to be insensible of such advantages, to have no relish of them, no complacency in them, for neither reason nor religion require such a conduct from us. They are the good things of life, given us by the author of all good, on purpose that we should, in due measure and season, enjoy them; nor can they of themselves, while our appetites and our opinions concerning such things are well regulated, be hurtful to those who possess them. They may be used, if they are not overvalued; if we do not suffer our affections to cleave too closely to them, and our minds to be in any degree inflated and swelled by a reflection upon them. They may be a part, a small part of our happiness in this transitory scene of life, provided we always retain in our minds the apostle's directions concerning them—That they who have these things, be as though they had them not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away. 1 Cor. vii. 31. These worldly advantages, these honours, profits, pleasures, whatever they be, are of uncertain continuance, and may, in a little time, slip away from

us; to be sure we shall in a little time slip away from them, and leave them behind us, and therefore why should we rest in them? Why should we boast of them? Why should we feed and raise, not our appetites and lusts only, but our vanity and pride also, by the means of them?

The christian religion, by the tendency of all its doctrines (particularly that of Christ crucified), by the manner of its progress, and the mean characters of those who first promulged and embraced it, seems to have been so throughout contrived, as effectually to mortify and beat down any undue complacency we may have in ourselves on such occasions. *Ye see your calling, brethren* (says St. Paul, with that *παρρησία*, that becoming freedom of speech, in which he excels), *how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world, and the things which are despised, hath he chosen, yea, and the things which are not, to bring to nought the things that are.* 1 Cor. i. 26. And to what end did he thus order matters in the propagation of his gospel? Even to this (as it follows), *that no flesh should glory in his presence, but that he who glorieth might glory in the Lord; might value himself upon being a serious, sincere christian, and upon nothing besides it.*

Indeed, it is enough to disparage all the fine shews and appearances of this life, and to render us indifferent to all the charms of it, if we do but attentively consider that complete instance of suffering greatness and goodness, on which our faith and devotion ought this day to be employed: for on this day they all were, together with the handwriting of ordinances (the ceremonious observances of the law), blotted out, fulfilled and defaced, and nailed by Christ to his cross (Col. ii. 14.), as the scripture speaks; on which, when he was lifted up, he did there crucify the world, and the things of it, eclipse the lustre, and destroy the power of all its empty vanities. Behold then our high-priest, offering up the great sacrifice required for the redemption of souls! pouring out his

own blood on the altar of his cross, and thereby making an atonement for the sins of the whole world! Behold him, I say, by the eye of faith, and you will acknowledge, that though there never was any spectacle so sad, yet neither was there ever any so glorious, or so worthy of being contemplated and admired by men and angels. Stript indeed he was of all outward comforts and supports, surrounded he was with every thing that to human nature was grievous; and yet, even in this depth of his humiliation, if we consider the mighty work he was accomplishing, we cannot but despise all the vain pomps of life, in comparison of the splendour of his sufferings. For then, even then, while he hung on the cross, was the great captain of our salvation fighting our battles, and subduing our enemies; then was he *leading captivity captive* (Eph. iv. 8.), *spoiling principalities and powers, making a show of them openly, and triumphing over them in himself* (Col. ii. 15.); then was he vanquishing death by his death, and opening for us a gate to life and immortality: then was he disarming sin of its sting, and hell of its terrors, and procuring for us those supplies of grace which might enable us to withstand the temptations of sense and the wiles of the devil.

Surely the vain glories of this world, when compared with these real triumphs of the cross of Christ, must lose all their force and influence, and grow flat and insignificant in the eyes of a good christian. Can we look up to him that was pierced, see him stretched on his cross, enduring the pain, despising the shame of it, and not look down with neglect and contempt on that scene of sin and vanity which occasioned those sufferings? Is it possible for us to *love the world, and the things that are in the world* (1 John, ii. 15.), while our eyes are fixed on him who *gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world* (Gal. i. 4.); i. e. on purpose that he might free us from the enchanting power of its empty delights and vain allurements? These he taught us by his doctrine and by his practice, by his life and by his death, to undervalue; he chose to be without them, and the perfection of his virtue consisted in overlooking and despising them. We there-

fore, who profess to be his followers, must certainly degenerate very far from that profession, when we eagerly pursue, greedily enjoy, and highly admire them.

Beloved, this *our glorying is not good* (1 Cor. v. 6.); but

II. It highly becomes us to *glory in the cross of Christ*, as I proposed in the second place to shew: for since, by the alone merits of his cross, we gain all the advantages of the christian dispensation, are reconciled to God, and made capable of heaven and happiness, we cannot but glory in that cross, if indeed we value ourselves upon our being christians.

The cross of Christ is the doctrine to which all the other doctrines of the gospel refer, and from which they derive all the efficacy and influence they have towards purging our consciences from dead works; and therefore, in that single article, they are often all of them summed up and comprised. *We preach Christ crucified* (1 Cor. i. 23.), says St. Paul; as if that, and that alone, were the subject of all he wrote, and all he spoke: and again, *I determined to know nothing but Christ and him crucified* (1 Cor. ii. 2.); as if that were the great point of saving knowledge, to which those who learn, or who teach the religion of Christ, should altogether apply themselves. Can we look upon it under this view, and refrain from glorying in it? To this article of our faith the enemies of the gospel have always taken the greatest exceptions; and in this therefore we ought to triumph most, as being secure against their attacks, and despising their vain objections and reasonings. The first preachers of our faith must, in this case, be our patterns. They knew that *Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling-block* (1 Cor. i. 23.); but did they therefore dissemble the scandal of the cross for that very reason? No. They boasted of it; they insisted upon it in all their applications to the unbelieving Jews, recorded in the Acts (Acts, x. 39.); particularly St. Peter omits no occasion of mentioning to them him *whom they slew, and hanged on a tree*; as an high reproach to his murderers indeed, but none at all to his disciples and followers.

Very fitly, therefore, has the church of England appointed that, after we have been received into the congregation of *Christ's flock* by baptism, we should be

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signed with the sign of the cross, in token (as he speaks) that we should not hereafter be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, but should manfully fight under his banners against sin, the world, and the devil, and continue Christ's faithful soldiers and servants to our lives ends: a ceremony which, whatever fault may have been found with it, is certainly very ancient, very innocent, and very significant too; as it fitly admonishes us, throughout the whole course of our christian warfare, to look upon the cross of Christ as the proper badge of our profession, which we ought not to be ashamed or afraid to own, whenever he, in whose service we are lifted, shall call upon us to take it up, and follow him. But to proceed, I am to shew,

III. By what methods, and in opposition to what enemies of the cross of Christ we are obliged to glory in it.

I. Now the first step requisite towards our complying with this obligation is, frequently to meditate on the sufferings and death of Christ. We glory in nothing but what we esteem and value; and what we value much, we shall be apt often and attentively to consider. We should therefore revolve often in our thoughts this *great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh, dying on the cross, to destroy the works of the devil.* 1 Tim. iii. 16. We should turn it on all sides, and consider it as the proper subject of our awe and wonder, our joy and pleasure, our gratitude and love; till we have warmed our hearts with a lively sense of the inestimable benefits conferred on us by the means of it. This the oftener we do the better: but we cannot, without inexcusable negligence, omit doing it on such a day as this, set apart by the church on purpose to commemorate the passion of our Lord. If we fail to employ some part of this day in our closets, and in devout meditations on the cross of Christ, we are unworthy of that redemption he purchased for us. *What (said our Saviour to his sleeping disciples, when he was entering on his agony), can you not watch with me one hour?* Matth. xxvi. 40. Can you not shake off your drowsiness, and bear me company in my sorrows, for a few moments, on so important and becoming an occasion? Can your sluggish inattention and indifference to what concerns me so nearly, consist with

a true love of me, or with the character of my faithful disciples? *What! can ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation.*

2. A second step towards fulfilling our obligation to glory in the cross of Christ is, if we endeavour to imitate the perfect example he hath set us, and to form in our minds some faint resemblances of those meek graces and virtues which adorned the character of our suffering Saviour. And this step is a natural consequence of the former, for imitation will in some degree spring from attention: *if we see him as he is, we shall be like him*, as St. John argues. In vain do we boast of the cross of Christ, as that whereby the guilt of our sins is abolished, if the power of them still remains unsubdued in us. Then are his sufferings our glory, when they become a fruitful principle of holiness to us, and effect us in such a manner as to give us resolution and strength to live above the world, and all its temptations. *In hoc vince*, was the inscription on the cross, in that vision by which the first christian emperor was encouraged to give battle to his enemies; and this also is the motto by which every good soldier of Christ is to animate himself in his spiritual conflicts; this is to be written in our banners, and graven on our minds: *this is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith* (1 John, v. 4.) in a crucified Jesus. When from him we shall have learnt to undervalue the false glories of this world, and to despise its terrors, to live above the gratifications of sense, to resign ourselves absolutely to God's disposal, and to make it *our meat and our drink, our only study and delight, to do the will of him that sent us* (John, iv. 34.); when we shall have emptied ourselves of all swelling thoughts, all vain conceits of our own privileges and perfections, and shall be thoroughly instructed in that great lesson of humility, which he, who was *meek and lowly in heart* (Matth. xi. 29.), hath taught us; when we shall have so considered him that endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, as not to be weary and faint in our minds (Heb. xii. 3.), upon the like oppositions and trials; so as to bear indignities and injuries decently and well, and to forgive and pray for those who do them; so as to be able

to support ourselves under any of the calamities of life with equanimity and patience, with fortitude and firmness; then may we be said most truly, most effectually, to glory in the cross of Christ ourselves, and to promote the honour of his religion with others, who shall observe our progress in all divine graces and virtues, and be edified in beholding our good conversation in Christ Jesus.

3. A third instance and proof of our glorying, as becomes us, in the cross of Christ, is, if we frequently and worthily celebrate the memorial of his death, the blessed sacrament of his body and blood: *for as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew forth the Lord's death until he come* (1 Cor. xi. 26.); *καταγγελλετε*, ye do significantly express it, do solemnly publish and declare it. Indeed, both the sacraments, that of baptism, and this of the Lord's supper, as they derive their efficacy from the cross of Christ, so do they carry in them some resemblance of his death: baptism, of his death and resurrection jointly; the eucharist, of his death only; being instituted for this very end and purpose, to imprint on our minds, by the symbols of bread broken and wine poured out, a lively image of the great sacrifice of the cross, and to inspire us, by that means, with such holy thoughts and affections, as a good christian would have if he were really an eye-witness of the passion of Christ. Often therefore ought we to resort to this mysterious repast, even as often as we have occasion (and when have we not occasion?) to raise our gratitude, and improve our devotion, and inflame our love towards God, for the abundant mercies bestowed on us, in the sufferings and death of our Saviour. Nor can we abstain from this table of the Lord, without forgetting (indeed without so far renouncing) our relation to Christ crucified, and thereby declaring ourselves utterly unworthy of that holy name whereby we are called. *Verily, verily, except we eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, we have no life in us.* John, vi. 53.

It was his dying charge to us, *Do this in remembrance of me* (Luke, xxii. 16.): and surely, considering how much he has done and suffered for us, had he com-

manded us some hard thing, we should not have refused to comply with him; how much less shall we refuse, when we are only commanded to remember him, by an action naturally pleasing and delightful to us; when he invites us only to eat and drink at his own table?

Christ, the same night that he was betrayed, took bread: at that very time when men were laying snares for his innocence, and contriving his ruin, did he appoint this great means of blessing and strengthening them. When his body was now about to be pierced, and his blood to be spilt, by the hand of violence, then did he institute this mystery, by which the merits of both were to be conveyed to the whole race of mankind, even to his murderers themselves, if by faith and repentance they should lay hold of them. Must not our stupidity and ingratitude be as amazing as his love, if the very circumstances in which he gave us this precept, do not incline us to obey it? Can we be said to glory in the cross of Christ, while we neglect and despise this great memorial of his death, which he instituted for the good of souls? Ought we not rather to fear, lest by abstaining wilfully and contemptuously from this holy table, we should involve ourselves in some degree of their guilt, whom the apostle declares to have trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant, by which they were sanctified, an unholy thing. Heb. x. 29. But finally, we may, in the

4. Fourth place, he said (very properly said) to glory in the cross of Christ, when we zealously assert and vindicate the true doctrine of his satisfaction, against all the enemies and opposers of it; against the false notions of the Jews, and the false religion of the Mahometans; against the mischievous opinions of some deceived or deceiving christians; against the vain pretences of reason and philosophy; and against the proud insults and blasphemies of atheists and infidels. But these particulars would open too large a field of matter to me at present, and may perhaps (God permitting) be no improper subject for our reflections on a like occasion.

In the mean time, let us conclude, by rendering to the great lover of souls

the thanks that are due to him, for the redemption which he, as on this day, purchased for us.

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing (Rev. v. 82.): for he hath redeemed us to God by his blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. Ver. 9. Therefore blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever! (Ver. 13.) Amen.

S E R M O N XVIII.

External Worship a fit and reasonable Duty.

PSALM XCV. 6.

O come let us worship, and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.

THESE words are taken from an hymn, which is very fitly placed at the entrance of the morning devotions of the church, it being a solemn and earnest invitation to the public worship of God that follows, and probably employed to that purpose at the beginning of the service used in the Jewish temple.

In that hymn we are called upon to pay all the parts of our internal and external homage.

The words which I have chosen mention only the latter of these, outward adoration, which they do by expressing the several modes of it, as worshipping, bowing down, and kneeling before God; terms, which those who are skilled in the original, have been at some pains to explain, so as to settle the distinct meaning of each of them. I shall wave that inquiry, as not very useful, and consider the words in their more free and general sense, as they imply all those devout postures of body, in which outward worship may be supposed to consist.

To press upon you as effectually as I can the exercise of these, when we thus meet together in God's sanctuary, shall be the business of my present discourse:

In which I shall endeavour to shew, how requisite a reverent and pious de-

meanour in the public service of the church is, in order to render our devotions acceptable to God.

This perhaps, at first sight, may seem too plain a proposition to need any proof; and it will be thought, that there is no good christian in the world who is not very well satisfied of the truth of it: and yet, certain it is, that there are, among those who aim at a more than ordinary purity in the worship of God, many sincere but deluded persons, who disapprove and deny it; who think external modes of worship not only unnecessary but superstitious, now under the gospel dispensation, when, they say, all bodily service is done away, the law of outward rites and ceremonies is abolished, and the true worshippers of God are to *worship him only in spirit and truth.* John, iv. 24.

And even among those who admit the necessity of bodily worship in the theory, yet how many are there that deny it in their practice, and so behave themselves in the public service of the church, as to make it appear, that this truth has not in good earnest reached their hearts, or not sunk very deep into them: or if it has, the impressions it once made upon their minds are now grown so faint and weak, that they operate but little, unless by proper arguments and motives they be continually excited and kept alive in them.

In order therefore to convince those who seem not to have sufficiently considered the importance of this duty, and in order also to raise the devotion of such as are remiss and careless in the discharge of it, I shall, in what follows, consider external worship as a fit and reasonable duty, upon these three several accounts: either as one part of that natural homage which the whole man, soul and body, does, by the first principles of reason and law of his nature, owe to his sovereign Lord, his great creator and preserver; or as an help and assistance towards promoting the spiritual worship of our souls; or lastly, as an outward sign, by which we express to others the religious esteem and veneration that dwells in us: that is (in a word), it may be considered with relation to God, ourselves, or our neighbour.

I. Then external adoration may be considered as a part of that natural homage which the whole man, soul and body, owes to God, upon the account of his creation and preservation of us, and his sovereign dominion over us.

If we are to worship God for the being, and the benefits which we receive at his hands, as the plain rules of reason inform us, then does it seem agreeable to the same reason, that we should make use of all those several ways of worship, which do best express the total and entire dependance we have on him. The soul worships him, by framing to itself awful ideas of his majesty and great excellencies, by invoking aid and assistance from him, and by putting up praises to him. The body worships him by bowing and prostrating itself, and by all those humble and devout postures which suit best with those inward affections and dispositions of the mind. Both together make up that complete harmony of divine worship which results from the agreement of the several parts of our frame in the same acts of acknowledgment, that *odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God.* Phil. iv. 18,

Indeed, as we have no way of forming to ourselves any idea of God, but by considering the several limited perfections and excellencies that are variously scattered among his creatures, and attributing them to *him without bounds*; so have we no other way of applying ourselves to him, as his vassals, his dependants, and the works of his hands, than by considering what are those inward and outward marks of respect which we usually pay to the dignity of any man here upon earth, to his authority over us, or his beneficence towards us; and by giving them to God in a much higher degree than we do to man. Now, the expression of our esteem of any earthly good, the respect we bear towards persons of great excellence, parents, benefactors, or governors, is contained in these two things—a veneration of mind for them, and a submission of body to them.

And whoever fails in either of these is, by the general consent of mankind, reckoned to be so far wanting in his duty, and to deviate from those rules of

subordination which God has made necessary for this world.

Of this the mind of man is very sensible, and being therefore conscious of the superlative excellencies of the Divine Being, and of the infinite goodness of its nature towards us, finds itself uneasy under these apprehensions, till it has paid its due homage, its debt of honour to it; which, nevertheless, it has no ability to do, otherwise than by applying to God those outward sensible marks of respect, and those inward submissions of soul, which are in use among the sons of men.

To these therefore it flies, these it lays hold of, eager and impatient to do something (it knows not well what), in humble acknowledgment of his attributes, and in return to his many loving kindnesses.

It sees very well how disproportioned all our acts of homage are to the divine greatness; that God dwells in inaccessible light, to which none of our services can reach; in the glory of an eternal majesty, which nothing we can do can either add to or diminish. Nevertheless, perceiving in itself a restless principle, exciting it continually to the love and honour of God; strong endeavours after gratitude, and no other way of exerting them but by inward and outward acts of worship; these, how insignificant soever, it ventures to pay, in sure confidence that they will be grateful to that Being which *accepteth according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.* 2 Cor. viii. 12.

Thus does external adoration become a point of natural homage, due to the supreme Lord of the world, in token of that entire dependance we have on him; the dependance of the whole man, soul and body, which both equally came forth from his hands, and are both equally sustained by him. Both therefore must join in paying the common tribute of praise, which however to him it may be nothing worth, of less account than *a drop of the bucket, or a small dust of the balance* (Is. xl. 15.), yet to us-ward is the very law of our nature, and our bounden duty and service.

And this is the way of reasoning which the Holy Ghost, in both testaments, hath sanctified, and taught us to use.

We are invited, by the good Psalmist, in my text, to *bow down, and kneel before God*; and the reason follows—for *he is the Lord our God, and we are the people of his hands*: agreeably to which the apostle urges us, to *glorify God in our body, and in our spirit, which are God's*. We are to glorify him *in our body*, as well as *our spirit*; by outward as well as inward devotion, since there is the same argument for both—they are *God's*. His they are, and to him they must do their homage.

And therefore it is a remarkable passage which the same apostle hath: *I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.* Rom. xii. 1. Though he mentions only the presenting our bodies, yet he gives that the name of our *reasonable service*, ἡ λογικὴ λατρεία ἡμῶν, a worship agreeable to reason, and to the suggestions of our natural faculties.

We all look for the glorification not only of our souls but bodies, in the life to come. Now a reward supposeth a work: it is meet and right therefore that we should worship and glorify God in this life, with the body as well as the soul, if so be we expect that God should glorify *both our bodies and souls in another*. The outward worship, without the inward, is dead; and again, the inward without the outward is not complete: even as the glorification of the soul, separate from the body, is not nor shall be consummate, till the body be again raised and reunited to it.

Indeed, they who derogate so much from bodily worship in the service of the true God, do, by consequence, render idolatry a sin far less heinous in degree than it is: for the sin of idolatry consists, we know, in our communicating that honour to a creature which is due unto the Creator alone; and therefore, in the same proportion as external worship is due to the Creator, will the grievousness and guilt of that sin be by which we transfer that worship from the Creator to the creature; for it cannot be denied but that part of the sin of idolatry consists even in the outward worship given to an idol. And therefore, if outward worship be not insisted on with any strictness now under the

gospel, as a debt due to God, neither will the paying it to idols be in any high degree culpable.

Thus does the consideration of outward worship, as it respects God, the object of it, afford us one powerful motive to a composed and solemn behaviour in the public service of the church. Let us see what force it will have, as it relates to ourselves, or as it is,

II. An help and assistance towards promoting the spiritual worship of our souls.

There is so close a connection between the mind and its organs, that they act, as it were, by consent, and the motions of the one do commonly, and in some degree, pass into the other; and this natural sympathy shews itself no where more remarkably than in acts of devotion. When the mind is warmed with heavenly thoughts, and wrought up into some degrees of holy ecstacy, it stays not there, but communicates these impressions to the body, and excites those several actions without, that carry a resemblance to what is done within.

On the other side, devout postures of body, when perceived and attended to by him that uses them, do as certainly pass onward, and impart their force to the mind also, raising there those several passions and emotions to which the outward act is naturally conjoined. It is true, the rise of all is originally from within: there the springs of action first begin to play, and from thence orders are sent out to the body, what motions shall arise. But then, after that, this engine, thus moved, acts backward upon its first principle, the soul; returns the force that was lent it from thence with interest; and improves that spark of holy fire, which first sprung up there, into a great and mighty flame.

External worship then becomes this way a just and reasonable duty, inasmuch as it is naturally fitted to excite like inward acts of devotion; and being itself perceived, does, in a way not perceived by those who yet feel the effects of it, work upon the most hidden powers of the mind. And it is very well it does so; for the mind of man is, in the duties of religion, so little mistress of strict attention, so unable to fix itself steadily even on God, its best and worthiest object, that it cannot have too

many assistances from without, in order to it. As therefore God hath so tempered the body together in all its members; that *the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor the head again unto the feet, I have no need of you* (1 Cor. xii. 21.); so has he also tempered the whole frame of man in such a manner, as that the parts of it may mutually support each other. Nor can the soul, in its most spiritual and sublime acts, those of devotion, reject the body as useless and unassisting: *Nay much more* (as St. Paul continues his reasoning), *that part which seems to be more feeble, is necessary.* 1 Cor. xii. 22.

We usually blame the body to an high degree, as the great clog and hindrance of the soul; the obstructor of its free and natural motions; the offerer of impious, of filthy, of vain images; the solicitor to every evil act, all that defiles the man: and this is generally what may be said of it, with a great deal of justice; for it is all this, and it does all this, in a thousand several instances. But in the case of devotion now before us, things may be far otherwise managed, and the body rendered so useful and serviceable to the soul in this duty, as to make amends (as it were) for the obstructions it gives it in the performance of many others. Here it may be made to draw equally in the yoke of duty, nay even to give wings to the mind, which it presseth down, and overwhelms on many other occasions. Nor is the body more beholding to the soul for the beginning of its motions, than the soul afterwards is to the body for the increase of her's. But,

III. We have still another way of considering outward worship, as it is a sign, by which we express to others the religious esteem and veneration that dwells in us; and we shall find, that from hence too we are highly obliged to the most solemn and devout use of it. For as in the former instances it has appeared to be an instrument of God's honour, and our own particular advantage, so here we shall find that it reaches even to the common good of our neighbour too.

And certainly great are the advantages which the people of God, when they are met together, do mutually receive from it. The cold and remiss

worshipper is, at the sight of an exemplary piety, kindled into some degrees of holy warmth: the fervent and devout, in the presence of it, becomes yet more inflamed; a religious emulation rises then in the breasts of the faithful, an holy strife and desire of excelling. He that sees another composed in his behaviour throughout, and fixed down to the holy duty he is engaged in, grows ashamed of his own indifference and indecencies, his spiritual dissipations and dryness, and presently sets himself to imitate that amiable pattern, and resolves to be remarkably devout, and as much the object of other men's imitation.

But believers are not the only persons that receive benefit by it; unbelievers too, though unwillingly, have their share. The prophane scoffer, who dares encounter a single christian, without shame or fear of reproof, has here an answer to his bold scoffs, in that still and powerful argument which arises from the behaviour of a devout multitude, worshipping God *in the beauty of holiness*; such an argument as will destroy all his unreasonable suspicions, and convince him of the sincerity of men's hearts towards God, by the natural, unaffected signs of it which are shewn in his service; such as will put him in mind of the numbers of devout and good men, against which he engages; lead him on from the thought of the present congregation to those of the same kind that are spread over the face of the earth; and make him sit down and consider, whether with such a small strength (his own, and that of a few more) he can encounter so many thousands, even the united wisdom and practice of mankind. Surely, as St. Paul argues in relation to the prophesying practised in the primitive church, *if all thus worship, and there cometh in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all. And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report, that God is in you of a truth.* 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25.

Thus have I explained the several grounds on which external adoration stands, and the several good uses to which it may be employed; how much the

the honour of God depends upon it, the advancement of piety in our own breast, and in that of our neighbour : and sure I need exhort you but briefly to the practice of that, which appears every way so plain and so reasonable a duty. Let us then lay up these thoughts in our hearts, *and keep our feet* (as the wise-man speaks) *when we go to the sanctuary*, by a careful reflection upon them ! Let us carry in our ears always, when we enter into the place of God's public worship, the sound of those expressions he used to Moses out of the flaming bush : *Put off thy shoes from thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground !* Exod. iii. 5.

Let us consider with ourselves, if such and so many are the advantages that spring from a due care of external behaviour, how great must the inconveniences then be that arise from the neglect of it, from an indecent and slovenly worship ! a worship fit neither for God, who is a God of beauty and order, to receive ; nor for man, who is the only creature in this lower world that has a sense of these things, to pay. Surely nothing less can follow, from so loose a practice, than the decay of religion in all its vital and substantial parts ; a forgetfulness of that God, whom to have always in our thoughts, is the greatest preservative against sin that a christian man can have ; the derisions of the proud toward these our solemn meetings, and the open scorn of every thing that is holy.

From the primitive writers of the story of the church we learn, that the first christians, who were so exemplary in all the parts of christian duty above those of latter times, outstripped us in nothing more than in the outward marks of devotion and reverence which appeared upon them in their public assemblies. They resorted to the house of God with the same holy awe and reverence as if they were really to meet and to converse with him there : they continued, during the time of divine service, immoveably fixed to their duty, without the least sign or token of a wandering or alienated mind : they contented not themselves with the ordinary postures of devotion, such as genuflection, the bowing of the head or the body, but did (as one of the an-

cients speaks) prostrate themselves on the pavement, cover it with their bodies, and wash it with tears of devout joy.

God grant, that if these heights of devotion be too exalted for an age so degenerate as this, in which *iniquity abounds*, and *the love of many is waxen cold*, yet, at least, that so much of the life and spirit of primitive piety may be kept up among us, as may render our behaviour sober and composed in the use of holy things, and take away from wicked men an occasion to blaspheme !

Now to God the Father, &c.

S E R M O N XIX.

External Worship shewn to be of no Efficacy, unless accompanied with internal Devotion ; together with the excellent Contrivance of the Church of England Service to promote the latter.

LAMENT. iii. 41.

Let us lift up our hearts with our hands, unto God in the heavens,

THESE are the words of Jeremiah, spoken to the Jews of his time, who were very exact and punctual in the outward ceremonies and performances of religion, but very deficient in the inward life and reality of it. They resorted to the temple constantly, and were careful to practise the various rites which the law of Moses prescribed : but they did not bring along with them a disposition of soul suitable to those solemnities ; their mind was alienated from the service, even while they were performing it. The Prophet, sensible of this great defect in their way of worship, thus exhorts them to the cure of it : *Let us lift up our hearts* (says he) *with our hands, unto God in the heavens.*

Which words refer to the Jews, as performing the public service of their church in the temple or the synagogue, and imply, that the devotion of the hand, without that of the heart, is of no acceptance with God : that *bodily exercise* (in this sense of the word) *profiteth but little* (1 Tim. iv. 8.), unless accom-

panied with an holy warmth and elevation of mind.

This is a very plain but unregarded truth. Many christians there are who seem not to be thoroughly convinced of it; and the best of us, God knows (such is the infirmity of our nature), want sometimes to be awakened into a vigorous and lively sense of it.

Many frequenters of such religious assemblies as these, think their duty sufficiently discharged by a punctual and regular attendance upon them. If they are present during the time of divine service, if they take their share in the several parts of it, join in the hymns and the responses, and add their *Amen* to the prayers; if their outward behaviour be every way decent, and agreeable to the holy usages of the church; though they are inwardly absent from the duty wherein they seem to be engaged, and their wandering thoughts are employed all the while on foreign and vain objects, yet shall they go away satisfied and justified in their own conceit, as if they had performed the whole of their reasonable service, and not offered *the sacrifice of fools* (Eccl. v. 1.); forgetting the reproof which *Isaias* first gave to the whole Jewish nation, and which our Saviour applied particularly to the Scribes and Pharisees: *This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouths, and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.* Matt. xv. 8.

That such a mock worship as this, such a mere face and form of devotion, is not what God requires, what he will hearken to or reward, give me leave briefly to shew, by observing, how unproportioned it is to the divine nature and our own, to the great end and design of prayer, and to those mighty blessings and benefits with which, when duly performed, it is certainly attended.

The object of our religious addresses is God, *that God who is a spirit*, and who therefore will be *worshipped in spirit* (John, iv. 24.), as our Saviour argues, with all the faculties and powers of our mind, with the utmost intention and vigour of thought; and he therefore who lifts up his hands to him, without any elevation of his heart, affronts him instead of adoring him. *Bless the Lord, O*

my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name! (Psalm ciii. 1.) says good David. He summons every faculty and affection of his soul, *all that is within him*, to do homage to God, as knowing that the mere outward homage, unaccompanied by the inward, would be a lifeless and useless performance. What! do we hope to impose upon God as we sometimes do upon men, by a mere *form of godliness*, without the power of it? Do we think that he requires our adoration and homage for his own sake, and therefore contents himself with the honours that are done him by outward shews and appearances? He *who requirerh truth in the inward parts* (Psalm li. 6.), *to whom all things are naked and open* (Heb. iv. 13.), and *who trierh the very hearts and reins* (Psalm vii. 9.); he whose language in holy writ is, *My son, give me thy heart!* *Give me thy heart* (Prov. xxiii. 26.), whilst thou art performing any part of thy duty that relates either to me, thyself, or thy neighbour; but chiefly *give me thy heart*, whilst thou art immediately addressing thyself to me by prayer and praise; whilst thou art actually conversing with me, intreating, and adoring me: *give me thy heart at such a time*, or else all that thou givest me besides will prove a vain oblation. Again,

Let us consider our own nature, as well as that of the Divine Being. Are we not reasonable creatures? And ought not a reasonable creature to pay an entire and reasonable service? How can we be said to worship God while the better half of us is unconcerned in the act? It is the mind chiefly that is the man, and where the mind therefore is absent the man is not present. He offers not a living and a breathing victim, but a dead and lifeless carcass; and *with such a sacrifice how can God be well pleased?*

What is prayer but an ascent of the mind towards God? an holy engine, by which we lift up our spirits to the great Father of spirits, maintain a sweet intercourse with him, and breathe out, from the bottom of our hearts, our common desires and acknowledgments to him? And what is there of this, in *coming unto him*, as his people cometh, in *sitting before him* as his people sitteth; in *showing much*

love

love with our mouth, while our heart goeth after its covetousness? Ezek. xxxiii.

31. Wondrous is the efficacy of prayer, as represented in scripture: mighty things are there said to have been done in virtue of it. But how were they done? By the mere bending of the knees, and uttering of words and syllables? No; but by the attention of the heart, by zeal and fervency. It is only the fervent prayer of a righteous man that availeth much (James, v. 16.); and when Elias, by his prevalent interposition with God, shut up or opened the heavens, brought drought or rain upon the earth, it is said of him, *προσηύχην ἐκείνην ἡμέραν*, that he prayed ardently and earnestly. James, v. 17.

Indeed this qualification of prayer is enjoined us by God, not only as a becoming expression of our religious reverence towards him, but as a proper and natural means of working in our souls those good dispositions which his blessed Spirit delights in, and delights to reward. We are directed to ask with a fixed and fervent mind; because such a manner of asking fits and qualifies us for receiving; makes us humble, submissive; dependant, affects us with a deep sense of our own insufficiency and unworthiness, and of the divine bounty and goodness; suspends the evil motions and desires of our hearts for a time, and produces in us an heavenly frame and temper of soul. This is the nearest and most immediate effect of prayer, which must first be obtained in order to the obtaining of our requests; and how therefore can he who is a stranger to the one of these, ever hope to arrive at the other?

Can we imagine that pardon of sin, and peace of conscience, the fruits of the Spirit, and support against temptations; in a word, the blessings of this world and the next, with which God has promised to reward our prayers, should be purchased at the cheap expence of forms and appearances? that those devotions which affect not us first, should affect God afterwards? that he should attend to, or regard such requests, as we neither regard nor attend to ourselves?

Let us then not mock God, and deceive ourselves! Let us not think we

have fulfilled our duty merely by resorting to the church, and adding one to the number of the congregation; by doing as other men do, and saying as other men say there; nor hope to atone by an outwardly decent behaviour, for an inwardly alienated mind. But let us, under a due sense of the preceding reflections, whenever we come to the house of God, not fail to come whole and entire, to offer and present unto God (as the Liturgy speaks) *ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice to him*; let us resolve to worship him, not with our lips and knees only, but (as we are obliged to love him) *even with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength*! Mark, xi. 30.

God be thanked, by whose good providence we are members of a church, where the public offices of religion are so modelled and contrived, as to be apt, in every part of them, to raise the attention, and kindle an holy flame in the breasts of all sincere worshippers. I cannot better spend the remaining part of my time, than in pointing out to you the great advantages which we, in this respect, enjoy, and by that means shewing you, how inexcusable we are if we neglect to improve them—more inexcusable than the members of any other church or communion in the christian world. For,

1. The language wherein our service is performed cannot but be of use to fix and keep alive our attention. It is our own mother tongue, what all of us are acquainted with, and can therefore listen to with ease and delight, because we understand it. There is a church whose public prayers are put up in a language unknown to the greatest part of those who are to join in them: but how can the heart be affected by the mere sound of words, while it is utterly a stranger to their meaning? The public devotions therefore of an unlettered papist, must needs be one continued scene of distractions and wanderings, from the beginning to the end of them.

Nor are our offices drawn up only in our own tongue, but in the most easy and plain parts of it, which lie open to christians of the meanest capacities and attainments. There is nothing fantastical in the expression of them, no vain use

use of such hard phrases of scripture, as tend rather to amuse and puzzle, than to instruct common hearers; nothing which approaches to that mysterious, unintelligible way of speaking, in which some either deceiving or deceived christians delight; nothing that favours of singularity, hypocrisy, or enthusiasm. Whatever we meet with there is plain, simple, natural, and yet at the same time solemn, majestic, moving; significant and full, sound and wholesome. It carries both light and heat in it, and is fitted equally to inform the understandings, and inflame the affections, of the wisest and weakest of christians. I need not say how far this excellence of our service contributes to rouse and inspirit the attention of those who partake of it, especially if it be considered,

2. That these prayers and praises are offered up in a premeditated form of words, with which every one is before acquainted; for this also I must reckon among the peculiar advantages of our way of worship, towards fastening down the minds of men to that holy duty wherein they are engaged. I grant indeed that unpremeditated prayers, uttered with great fluency, with a devout warmth and earnestness, are apt to make strong and awakening impressions on the minds of the generality of hearers. But it may be doubted, whether the attention thus raised be that which we are now recommending; whether it be not an attention rather of curiosity and surprise, than of real piety and sound devotion.—For a good and conscientious man, who is to join in a prayer with which he was before unacquainted, must needs do it with some little diffidence and fear, lest there should be any thing in the matter or manner of that prayer improper and unbecoming. He must suspend his assent to those unknown requests, till he has so far considered them, as to be sure that they are fit for him to agree in; and while he is thus employing his thoughts on one petition or sentence, another succeeds, which will require a like degree of suspense and deliberation; and this cannot but check his devotion, by dividing and breaking the force of his mind. Whereas he who offers up his requests to God in a known and stated form, has no avocations of this kind to struggle with, and can

therefore apply himself directly and vigorously to his holy task, and *ask in faith, nothing doubting*. James, i. 6. He fears not lest unfitting requests should be made, or fit ones clothed in unsuitable language; and is therefore at leisure to excite all the powers and affections of his soul, and to engage them in that spiritual service. This, I say, is a peculiar advantage which attends the use of pre-composed prayers; and if there be many who do not find and feel this effect of them, it is not, I am persuaded, the fault of set forms, but their own. They want attention and fervency in this way of worship, and they would want it equally, perhaps much more, in any other.

3. It is yet a farther great advantage which we, of this communion, enjoy, that our service is not one continued act of devotion, but is interrupted by many little breaks and pauses, and consists of several distinct and entire forms of petition and praise; by which means the mind is eased and relieved from too long and strict an attention; retires a little, and returns, as it were, with new strength to its duty. The collects of our liturgy are so short that a devout christian may, even whilst he is pronouncing his *Amen* at the close, by a sudden glance of thought, recollect every branch of them, and so, contract into that single word the whole force of the preceding prayer. Nay, the very frame and contrivance of these collects is highly useful to raise and to enliven our devotions, inasmuch as they generally begin with the awful mention of some of God's attributes, and always end with reminding us of the blood and intercession of Jesus: and what considerations in religion are there more operative and more awakening than these, which return so often upon our minds, during the course of our excellent service?

4. Which contributes also to render us attent and devout, by that useful and affecting variety with which it abounds. There is in it a variety of all sorts of religious duty, in which a creature can apply itself to its Creator. There we confess our sins, and intercede with God for the pardon of them. There we deprecate the divine judgments that may be inflicted, and pray for all the blessings (spiritual and temporal) that can be be-
stowed.

flowed on ourselves or others; and there we put up our praises and thanksgivings to God for all the instances of his mercy and goodness towards us. There we hear the holy scriptures read, and profess our belief of the great articles of faith; and these different parts of divine worship are so happily intermixed, and succeed each other in so beautiful an order, that the mind of the worshipper has always a new and pleasing employment.

As the priest has his share in the performance of these offices, so the people too have theirs, and in a much larger proportion than belongs to them in any other christian assemblies. Each is employed in stirring up the other into an holy and affectionate emulation of heart and voice, and they do therefore mutually provoke and kindle each other's devotion.

5. I add also (in the last place), that the service of our sanctuary is particularly contrived to promote attention by the decent, orderly, and solemn manner in which it is performed; for it is neither on the one side so very plain and simple as not to be able to rouse, nor on the other so splendid and gaudy as to be apt to distract the mind. It is duly tempered between these extremes, and partakes of either, as far as either is requisite towards creating and cherishing a sound and reasonable, a warm and active devotion. Pictures indeed, and images, to which the church of Rome in this case has recourse, fix the attention, but it is on a wrong object. A multitude of vain and pompous ceremonies, a variety of rich habits and ornaments, music framed for delight without improvement: these things indeed may render an assembly attent, but so likewise would a scene in the theatre. The devotion they produce (if indeed they produce any) goes no farther than the senses; it is not that of the heart and spirit. But with us, all the outside of our worship contributes towards the inward life and reality of it. Our churches are decently adorned; they who officiate at our altars are decently habited; our daily service is performed, and our sacraments administered, in a becoming and reverend manner; our music is always, or always ought to be, grave and solemn. Every part and circumstance of

our worship is so ordered, as to inspire us with an holy reverence and awe, and so far to keep the outward senses awake, as their vigilance may be of use to give wings to our devotion, and vigour to our minds.

Since therefore we have so many signal helps and advantages towards worshipping God in his sanctuary with an heavenly frame and temper of soul, let us resolve from this moment to make a due use of them; to repair often to the house of God with holy reverence and awe, and *to lift up our hearts, together with our hands, whenever we thus approach him, in the beauty of holiness.*

Which that we may all of us do, God of his infinite mercy grant, &c.

S E R M O N XX.

The Wretchedness of living in a wavering State of Mind.

GEN. xlix. 4.

Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.

THESE are part of the dying patriarch Jacob's words, when he blessed the twelve, *leaning upon the top of his staff.* Heb. xi. 21. Of the eldest of these (Reuben) the character he gives is contained in the words I have read to you, of which there are several very different interpretations: I shall not trouble you with them, but take that which they do most naturally and obviously bear. And according to that, Jacob does, in these words, seem to represent Reuben to be of a fickle, uncertain, irresolute temper; not utterly void of all propensions to goodness, but incapable of acting up to them; not without honest and virtuous resolutions, but unable firmly to keep and practise them; and this being his case, he pronounces upon him, that he *shall not excel*; that is, that he shall never arrive to any pitch and perfection in virtue, nor ever command a thorough esteem and respect from good men; that he should never be able eminently to distinguish himself by the exercise of those good qualities of mind which procure honour and happiness to men in this world, and in another.—*Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.*

From

From which words a natural occasion will be given me of discoursing to you of the ill condition of that man, who, like Reuben in the text, being *unstable as water*, is distracted between two courses of life, a good and a bad one: the unhappiness and wretchedness of which state after I have set out and proved to you at large, I shall apply myself to persuade the man that is thus bewildered, to retrieve himself by serious consideration, as soon as he can, and to fix a sure principle of virtue in his mind, that may guide and govern him throughout, and make him uniformly wise and holy.

Now the condition of a man who is divided between two contrary ways of life, between virtue and vice, godliness and irreligion, is certainly very wretched and deplorable; for he is in the meanest state of mind that human nature is capable of; he is perpetually restless and uneasy, full of anxiety and torment; he loses all the advantages of this world, and most assuredly forfeits all pretences to any in the next.

1. First, This doubtful, uncertain way of living and thinking proceeds from a mean state of mind, such as is beneath the dignity of human nature.

Man was made to discern and embrace truth, and for this reason *is there a spirit in him; and the inspiration of the Almighty has given him understanding.* Job, xxxii. 8. He has faculties whereby he may distinguish between true and false, right and wrong, and may fix to himself sure principles of action. When he does this, approves what is best, and sticks to what he approves, he does what he was designed to do, and answers the end of his being. When he does not, but suffers himself to be swayed and bent different ways by different motives, and to float under uncertainties, then he forfeits the great prerogative, and the most distinguishing advantage that belongs to the reasonable nature. The scripture therefore alloweth not to the irresolute and the inconstant the name of men; they are said to be *children tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine.* Eph. iv. 14. They are in the weakness and nonage of their reason, which is as yet not improved and ripened into its due strength and maturity.

The perfection of man is to be like God, for *in his own image created he him* (Gen. i. 27.): to be like God in all his attributes, particularly in that glorious one of his immutability, whereby *he is*, as the scripture speaks, *without variableness, or shadow of turning* (James, i. 17.): *the same yesterday, today, and for ever.* Heb. xiii. 8.

Now this immutability of God is twofold, relating either to his nature, or his purposes. The unchangeableness of his nature we have no room to imitate, for he designed us for a changeable state, made us creatures that were to purify our natures, and exalt them by degrees, till by his last great and glorious change he should translate us into an immortal and unalterable state, and make us eternally the same in our natures, and eternally happy in the exercise of them: but his moral immutability, the steadiness of his counsels, purposes, and actions, we may in some measure, and therefore must imitate, as far as human frailty will suffer us. We are like him in this perfection, when we get to ourselves, by thought and reflection, a firm persuasion of the eternal differences of good and evil, and of that inseparable dependance which reward and punishment have upon them; and when we govern our lives under the sense of these persuasions evenly and uniformly. This is truly godlike, the great improvement, the honour, and the excellence of our natures! And this perfection he robs himself of, who wavers between different principles and practices, and is sometimes good and sometimes bad as it happens. He puts not his faculties to that use for which they were given him; employs not his reason to those purposes for which it was designed, the establishing and strengthening of his mind in moral principles; but lives as much at random, and without hold, as if the breath of the Almighty were not in him.

Indeed, unless reason gives us a firmness and constancy of acting, it is so far from being the glory and the privilege, that it is really the reproach and disgrace, of our natures, and makes us lower than even *the horse and mule that have no understanding.* Psalm xxxii. 9. For they, without that, act always regularly and consonantly to themselves, under

der the never-erring guidance of instinct, a blind but sure principle : whilst man, with all his boasted titles and privileges, wanders about in uncertainties, does and undoes, and contradicts himself throughout all the various scenes of thinking and living.

2. But the dignity of our nature is a consideration capable of touching but few. Let us go on therefore to more plain and affecting considerations : for such an unsettled temper of mind as we have described creates a great deal of trouble and disturbance to the man who is so unhappy as to be master of it.

And this follows plainly from what has been discoursed upon the former head. For whatsoever is natural, becoming, and worthy of us, is attended always with ease and delight to the doer ; whereas that which thwarts our first end and design, and is destructive of our natural perfections, must needs be pain and grief to us. For the truth of which, in this particular case, we may appeal to the feeling of all those who have ever once made the experiment. How uneasy is that man always to himself who acts backwards and forwards, and has no sound bottom to rest upon ? What disquiets does it create in his mind to see himself perpetually condemning himself, allowing himself in that opinion or practice this hour, which he is sure he shall disallow and go against in the next ? [And this perhaps is the only part of his temper that he ever can be sure of.]

Certainly a mind, thus at odds with itself, cannot but be very troublesome to the man that has it, unless, together with the power of keeping his resolutions, he has lost also that of reflecting afterwards on the breach of them : for whenever he looks back upon his actions, guilt and folly will appear written, as it were, upon the front of them : he must needs pronounce himself light and inconsistent, insincere, and void of that true fear of God which dwells only with simplicity and a single heart. In fine, so many disagreeable and mortifying thoughts will offer themselves to him, as cannot but leave a wound behind them ; and a *spirit, thus wounded* (with guilt and folly too), *who can bear ?* In truth, as to ease of mind, it belongs oftentimes to the completely wicked, more than to

those who are by halves so. For the first may have hardened and stupified his conscience so far, till it lets him alone, and gives him no further notice of the dangerousness of the state he is in. But he who sins and repents, and then sins again in an endless circle, is sure to hear of his own follies, and be sensible of his own miseries. His good fits are like the short intervals of madness, which serve only to let the madman into a knowledge of his own disease ; whereas it would be much more to his satisfaction and content if he were mad always.

Good God ! When a man finds himself breaking through all the strongest bonds that should hold him, through his most deliberate resolutions, made in time of great danger and adversity, or upon his solemn approach, to the table of the Lord, but forgotten again in the presence of any new temptation, what horrors must the sense of this create in him ? What hatred and contempt of himself ? What despair almost of ever arriving at that strength and firmness of mind, which is requisite to carry him evenly on through the paths of virtue ? Surely he *is like the troubled sea, that cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to such a wicked one as this.* Isa. lvii. 20, 21.

But further, such a temper, so distracted between contrary inclinations and practices, is in the

3. Third place, mischievous to a man in point of interest as well as ease ; for it renders him unfit for all the affairs and business of life, incapable of forming advantageous designs with confidence, or of prosecuting them with effect. *A double-minded man* (saith St. James) *is unstable in all his ways.* Chap. i. 8. He that is so in point of religion (the greatest and most important concern of life, the one thing necessary), will probably be so in every thing beside ; and then, what kind of undertaking is such an one qualified for ? To what calling can he betake himself with any probability of success, who wants the very first elements of thriving, industry, constancy, and perseverance ? Alas ! the doubts and misgivings of his heart, concerning his own internal state, are such as take away from him the taste of all outward comforts at present, and

and hinder him from an effectual pursuit of them. It must be a *mind easy and at rest*, that can apply itself thoroughly towards making those advantages of the things of this life which are innocent and lawful; and such an one is not his, whose *ways* (as the wise man speaks) *are double before the Lord*. Besides this unequality in acting, these heats and these colds in religion, when once they appear, (and how can they chuse but appear some time or other?) will draw upon a man the suspicion of hypocrisy and dissimulation. He, who in the eye of the world is sometimes good and sometimes bad, as it happens, will be sure to have the measure of himself taken from the worst side of him, and the other parts of his character esteemed only as pure artifice and feigning. His credit will be blasted, and his good name taken away; that engine by which he is to profit himself and others, and to do all the good he is like to do in the world. Intimacies and friendships are the great comforts and supports of life, and of these such a man will be always thought incapable. What ground can his levity give any one to build their confidence upon? What encouragement is there to venture an acquaintance with the rash and unstable? What reason to expect a mutual consent and agreement of thoughts and affections from a mind so little at *unity in itself*?

4. But these are slight inconveniencies in comparison of what follows:—that such a wavering, uncertain temper of mind is utterly inconsistent with the terms of salvation, and the hopes of eternal happiness. For it is not an holiness taken up by fits and starts that can carry a man to heaven: it must be a constant, regular principle, influencing us throughout, that must do that. *If ye continue in my word* (says our Saviour), *then are ye my disciples indeed!* John, viii. 31. An uninterrupted course of virtue and goodness, and nothing less, can justify us before God, and entitle us to our reward: and the reason is, because nothing less can prove our sincerity to God, which is the great and fundamental rule by which we are to be tried; and a vein of this must run through all our thoughts and actions, to make them acceptable before God. *My son, give me thy heart* (says God); that

is, come to me with a sincere and unfeigned design of serving me, surrender up to me all thy inclinations and affections without reserve, and give me possession of thy soul, without any rival or competitor; which how can he be said to do that admits contrary interests perpetually to struggle within him, and in his heartiest repentance is not without some prospect of sinning again? Holy David therefore makes insincerity the character and mark of these kind of men: *Their heart was not right with God*, says he, *neither were they steadfast in his covenant*. Psalm lxxviii. 37. The one follows upon the other; if so be that they are not steadfast, neither can their hearts be *right with God*.

Let not a man therefore flatter himself that things are well with him, because he is not absolutely *given over to work wickedness*; but though he sometimes seems to be *dead in trespasses and sins* (Eph. ii. 1.), yet he soon rises again by repentance; for assuredly this (which is at the bottom nothing but an art of getting to heaven, and yet enjoying his lusts all the while) will not serve his turn. There is no promise in scripture that belongs to the *unstable and wavering* man: the terms of the covenant are universal purity, or at least universal sincerity, and under these can no man be saved. And as the state of a man is thus with respect to another world, very dangerous and bad already, so is it likely to grow worse and worse still without remedy. For every new return to sin, every single desertion of virtue, does naturally unqualify a man more and more for a sound repentance, and weakens all the motives that lead to it: sin does by this means grow familiar to us, and loses its frightfulness. By our suffering its continual approaches, it begins to appear to us in a more harmless shape: we find fewer horrors about us at the thought of it, fewer desires of avoiding it.

Besides, by these vicissitudes of sinning and relapsing, our resolution at last is quite broken, and we sit down every time with less hopes of the mercy and forgiveness of God, and of his grace and assistance.

Much more might be said, to set out the great danger of such a state, and the inconsistency of it with the terms of sal-

vation,

vation, if this were not too plain a point to need any further proof; and therefore I chuse rather, in what remains, to go on as I propos'd, from these several considerations, to persuade the man that is thus bewildered to retrieve himself by serious consideration, as soon as is possible; and to fix a sure principle of virtue in his mind, that may guide and govern him throughout, and make him uniformly wise and holy.

For which purpose I shall take leave to recommend two or three plain, but useful considerations.

1. And first, He that sets about this work must be sure that his belief is right, and sound at the bottom; for it is generally the uncertainty and waveringness of this, that produces all that unevenness and disorder in the life and practice of mankind. A sudden heat of devotion, or the fear of what will become of a man in the other world, will carry him sometimes into mighty resolutions of quitting sin, and living well for the future. But these wear off quickly, and come to nothing, because they arose only from present passion, and were not built on any good foundation, on any strong and full conviction of the mind: they are *the seed which fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth, and forthwith they sprang up, because they had no deepness of earth. But when the sun was up (when an hot temptation presented itself afresh) they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.* Matt. xiii. 5, 6. Let him therefore who would pursue this cure to purpose, look to himself, lest there be in him an evil heart of unbelief. Heb. iii. 12. Let him inquire diligently of himself; whereon it is that his faith stands; how he comes to be persuaded of the truth of natural principles, and of those of revealed religion; and let him (if he has it not already) procure to himself such an evidence of these things as is not to be shaken. For when this principle is once well fixed in his heart, virtue will go out from it into his life and actions; and it will work wonders towards making him all harmonious, and of a piece. When he has gone thus far, let him,

2. In the next place, consider well what that particular weight was, that in the days of his irresolution still hung

upon him, and clogged all his virtuous endeavours: what it was that, when his soul had made some effort towards goodness, overbalanced it still, and sway'd it secretly again towards nature's side: for that too is very often the case. There is some particular sin of our constitution, some great and ruling infirmity, that damps all our good motions, and spoils all our best resolutions, and will continue to do so till by a direct opposition of ourselves to it, we have conquered and removed it. When we have cut off this right hand, plucked out this right eye, sacrificed the darling lust of our heart, we may then hope that the greatest part of the difficulty is over, and that no less powerful temptation will be able to draw us aside. But till this be done, in vain are all our other attempts and designs. While the great offence has yet any hold upon us, nothing will be done to purpose; but he that has been divided in his opinion, and wavering in his practice, will be divided and wavering still.

When he has thus settled his faith upon good grounds, and armed himself well against *that sin which does so easily beset him* (Heb. xii. 1.), he must take care (in the next place) not to suffer himself to come within reach of any thing that may any ways unfasten his resolutions, whilst they are yet young and tender. He must admit of no debate within him about a principle, but throw off all such thoughts, as enemies to the peace of his mind. He must listen to no sceptical discourse, no loose reasonings of carnal men, such as pervert the truth; for these are the chief engines of Satan to draw him back again into his former unsettledness; and his good purposes may happen to be blasted in the bud, if they are ventured too soon amongst them. No! but let him root and ground himself in the faith first, by an answerable life and conversation: so shall it happen, that as his good practice took rise at first from his good opinions, so shall his opinions be strengthened afterwards by his practice; till both being confirmed in him, shall enable him to stand in the evil day (Gal. vi. 13.), and not to be afraid of whatever it is that would shake his steadfastness.

3. If to these endeavours he (lastly) joins fervent and unwearied prayer to

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Almighty

Almighty God for the aids and supports of his grace, he shall assuredly from thence be made perfect at last, be *stablished, strengthened, settled.* 1 Pet. v. 10. He shall have a new heart created in him, that shall enable him to be *steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.* (1 Cor. xv. 58.)

SERMON XXI.

The Duty of living peaceably explained and recommended.

Rom. xii. 18.

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

THERE are many excellent precepts and rules of duty laid together by the apostle toward the end of this chapter, but none of greater moment to be earnestly inculcated upon christians, and duly observed, than this which I have pitched upon for the subject of my following discourse. And I have the rather chose it at this particular time, because it is the last opportunity I shall have of bespeaking you under that character which I have hitherto born towards you. And it being likely therefore, that the contest now on foot, may end in the same little animosities and misunderstandings which are usual on such occasions, I thought I could not do better than to discourse to you upon a subject that might be of some use to temper and allay them; and to dispose you towards such a peaceable state of mind, as becomes those who are about to chuse a minister of the *gospel of peace.*

I shall discourse first to you of the argument at large, and then apply it to the particular occasion for which I have chosen it. What I have to say on these words must naturally fall under these four heads following :

I. Here is a command enjoined to *live peaceably.*

II. The utmost limits and extent of that command are set down: we must *live peaceably with all men.*

III. The great difficulty of so doing is allowed and expressed—*If it be pos-*

sible, says St. Paul, and *as much as in you lies*; intimating, that in respect of some tempers, and in some circumstances, it is scarce possible, though we do all that in us lies, to effect it. To which I shall add, in the

(IV.) Fourth and last place, some familiar helps and directions that may be of use to assist us towards performing it.

I. As to the first of these, the precept here given of *living peaceably*, I need not use many words to tell you what it is; it is easily and universally understood: would to God it were but as universally practised! and then such exhortations as these would be needless. But though an account of the duty may not be requisite, to inform even the meanest and most ignorant christian, yet it may be of use to bring to his mind what he already knows, and to awaken in him sensible and lively impressions of it; and to that end I shall, in a very brief and plain manner, describe it.

To *live peaceably*, is so to demean ourselves in all the offices and stations of life, as to promote a friendly understanding and correspondence among those we converse with; so as to prevent, as much as we can, all outward contention and strife, nay, all inward mistakes and jealousies, from arising, and to quench and allay them as soon as we can, whenever they are risen; so as to disagree openly with no man in things of an indifferent nature, and of no moment; and, where the point is of importance enough to deserve to be insisted on, there to do it, with so much candour and modesty, and sweetness, as not to offend even those we do not agree with. In a word, it is so to conduct our actions, discourses, and dealings, as to make ourselves and others as easy as is possible. Various are the instances of this duty, some influencing our behaviour with relation to the public, some towards private men; some regarding opinions, and some regulating our practice; some taking place in matters of civil life, and some in the concerns of religion.

They *live peaceably* with respect to the public, who pay a due regard to the laws of their country, and express a due reverence towards their superiors; honouring

honouring them sincerely, obeying them submissively: not rashly censuring their actions, but putting the best and most candid construction upon them; not being over-busy in matters that are too high for them, and do not concern them.

They *live peaceably* in religious matters, who, on the one side, are contented to enjoy their own opinions, without arraigning their superiors in church and state, for being otherwise minded; and without disturbing the public peace, in order to propagate their tenets, and make profelytes: and who, on the other side, do not, by unjustifiable methods of severity, force men into the profession of what they disbelieve; whose zeal for their faith never makes them forget their temper, nor outrun the bounds of christian goodness and prudence; who make great allowances for the weakness of men's reason and the strength of their prejudices, and condemn not all as insincere who are not so enlightened as they are, but leave them to stand or fall to their own matter; praying for them in the mean time, that they may come to the knowledge of the truth; and endeavouring, by all gentle, persuasive methods, to reclaim them.

Finally, They *live peaceably* in matters of common life and daily practice, who take care to make their carriage inoffensive, obliging; who are not ready to entertain ill reports of men, much less to disperse them; who whisper about nothing to set friends and neighbours at variance; who mind their own business, without intermeddling much in the concerns of others; who can take a slight affront or injury in conversation without resenting it, and even a great one without returning it.

But I forbear to give any further description of so known a duty, and go on to consider, in the

(II.) Second place, the extent of it. It must be practised towards all men; not only toward those who are in good terms with us, but toward those who are not; not only to the good-natured and candid, but even to the captious and the froward: for, as our Saviour argues in a like case, if you live peaceably with *them only*, who live peaceably with you, *what thank have you? Do not even sinners the same?* (Matt. v. 46.)

The worst, and worst-natured men will go thus far; for there is no temptation to break peace with those who live inoffensively with us, no room for contention with the mild and complying. The trial of our temper is, when shocking accidents happen to us, when ill words are given us; when we are touched in point of interest and honour, or in any other respect drawn into a dispute, and forced to engage; then to bear opposition meekly, to ward off the anger of our adversaries, by a discreet and dextrous address; to keep ourselves free from the contagion of that passion and that resentment which reigns in them, or free at least from the outward and visible signs of it, this is no vulgar attainment, but a very great pitch of christian perfection; and the apostle therefore, at the very time he is giving the precept, acknowledges the great difficulty that there is sometimes in obeying it. — *If it be possible*, says he, and *as much as in you lies*; intimating, as I said, that in respect of some natures, and in some circumstances, it is scarce possible, though we do whatever in us lies, to come up to it.

III. And this is the third thing I undertook to explain.

To *live peaceably with all men*, in the strictest sense of the words, is a thing absolutely impossible, and out of our reach; for it depends upon what we are not masters of, the dispositions and passions of other men. Let us take what care we can to prevent mistakes, they will sometimes arise; let us with never so much caution avoid doing injuries, we cannot always avoid receiving them. Some churlish and savage natures there are that delight in outrages, and are moved with no condescensions, no compliances; *such sons of Belial* (as was said of Nabal) *that a man cannot speak to them.* (1 Sam. xxv. 17.) Where violent encroachments are made upon our fortune or good name, we not only may, but must vindicate ourselves from them, though breach of peace, and an open rupture with any man, attend our doing it. Slight affronts, and small injustices, we may put up with; but where we are wounded to the quick, either in our estate or reputation, we are not at liberty to be silent; to be upon our defence in such cases is a debt we owe to

ourselves, our posterity, our relations and friends, who have all an interest in us.

When the cause of true religion suffers from the tongues or pens of libertines and unbelievers; when any open attempts are, by ill men, made on the constitution of that church or state whereof we are members; when an absent friend is traduced by lying lips, or the name of any sincerely good and virtuous man is vilified; it is our duty, in such cases, to stand up and rebuke this spirit of treachery, malice, or profaneness. The honour of God, or the interests of virtue, would, at such a time, be blemished by our silence and forbearance; and, therefore, the rule of our Saviour here takes place—*He that is not with us is against us*. He that doth not openly and heartily espouse the cause of truth, will be reckoned to have been on the other side; and then peace with men can never be eligible, when it implies enmity with God.

However, in all these cases, where we lay aside peace for a more valuable end, we are bound to have an eye to it, even while we seem to overlook it; and must so break with men on such occasions, as to leave room and to prepare the way for a closure. War itself has its rules and restraints, within which its savage cruelties are bounded: much more must the measures of our resentment, in such breaches as these, be tempered with great humanity and great prudence. We must recover our right, and wipe off aspersions, without rancour or revenge; we must contend for the truth of the gospel itself, so as not to forget the plain precepts of it; and for the glory of God, with such a well-regulated zeal, as does not trample upon any of his commands: that is, the warmth of our concern for the best doctrines, persons, or things, must never so far transport us, as to make us say any thing of any man, but what our cause and his character will justify; nor endeavour to inspire people with worse opinions concerning him, than we, in our consciences, believe he deserves. And to preserve ourselves thus far upon our guard, when we are engaged, is a much harder task than not to engage at all, and will require our calling in to our aid all the pious helps and expedients with which

reason and religion will furnish us, and which therefore I shall now, in the

(IV.) Fourth and last place, point out to you. Many of this kind there are; but the time I have already spent, and the application I am further to make of the whole, will not suffer me to mention all, or to dwell, as much as I ought, even on those that I do mention.

1. The rise of most of our disquiets and discords is from the tumultuous and disorderly motions of our passions; and these therefore must, in the first place, be well regulated, especially that fierce and boisterous passion of anger, which discovers itself the earliest, and is tamed the latest of any, and is, of all others, the greatest enemy of our repose. This therefore, and the rest, must be brought under the discipline and government of reason, if we ever hope to be easy to ourselves or other men; and indeed, unless we are first easy to ourselves, it is impossible we should ever be so to others. We may as well expect perpetual sunshine in climates subject to storms and hurricanes, as that there should be a lasting peace in that breast where the passions are allowed to reign.

2. The next plain help towards *living peaceably* is, if we moderate our desires, and shorten our designs, with regard to the good things of life, contenting ourselves with such a share of them, as answers all the good ends of living, and not eagerly grasping after more than would be of real use to us if we had it. The wants and conveniencies of nature are known and certain, and soon supplied, but imaginary wants are infinite and endless; and he that has set his heart upon them, will find it very difficult ever to recall it. He is got beyond reason in his desire, and will probably stick at no unreasonable method of obtaining it; and the natural issue of this must be, perpetual feuds and bickerings, contentions and struggles; for our desires will meet those of other men as eager every whit as ours, and as impatient of being resisted. *From covetousness come wars and fightings?* (says St. James) *come they not hence, even of your lust?* That is, from your covetous desires, for so it follows, *Ye lust, and have not; ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain* (James, iv. 1, 2.) A

3d Rule, in this case, is, to have a watchful

watchful eye upon ourselves, in our first entrance upon any debate or contest; and at that time to be sure to keep the reins closely in our hands, when there is the most danger in giving a loose to them, and they are the most easily manageable. For let us but indulge ourselves a little in the first motions of warmth and resentment, and by insensible steps and degrees we may be wrought up at last into all the height of madness and folly. *The beginning of strife* (saith the wise man) *is as when one letteth out water.* (Prov. xvii. 14.) When the bank is once broken down, we do not know how far it may flow, or how deep a space it may fill.

To this we may add,

4thly, A particular vigilance over ourselves, with regard to the intemperance of the tongue, that *member which setteth on fire the course of nature, and is itself set on fire of hell.* (James, iii. 6.) We must restrain it in every respect, but especially in relation to that natural proneness it has towards publishing the faults of others, which ought never to be done but with the utmost caution and tenderness. We can never strictly justify ourselves in speaking evil of any man, though that evil should be true, but when either the seal of friendship binds up the discourse, or the rules of charity and justice require us so to do. The son of Sirach seems to carry this matter very far: *Whether it be to friend or foe* (says he), *talk not of other men's lives; and if thou canst without offence, reveal them not* (Eccl. xix. 8.); which seems to bar us from spreading an ill-report of any man, but when we are under an absolute necessity of doing it. He that governs himself constantly by this rule, takes one of the surest and most promising steps towards *living peaceably with all men*; especially if,

5thly, He keeps himself always from embarking in parties and factions, and falling in with vehemence into all the interests and designs of them. This will necessarily in time embitter his spirit, and sour his humour, make him like and dislike men implicitly, and lead him into many resentments which he has nothing to do with.

Again, 6thly, Let a man that desires to pass through this world inoffensively, resolve to be very diligent in his parti-

cular profession and calling: and if he has none, to make one to himself by some proper and suitable employment. He that is employed has no leisure to move in the little disputes and quarrels which trouble the peace of the world, and which are chiefly kept up and bandied to and fro by those who have nothing else to do; the apostle therefore (we may observe), in his exhortation, joins *studying to be quiet*, with the *doing our own business* (1 Thess. iv. 11.), as if the one was a natural and inseparable attendant on the other.

Above all, let him add, in the last place, fervent and unwearied prayer to the blessed *Author of peace, and Lover of concord*, that he would please to vouchsafe him the inestimable benefits of it, and endue him with the qualities that promote it, by the powerful operation of that Spirit, whose fruits, love, joy, and peace, are peculiarly said to be; who inhabiteth only with those that do in some measure partake of them, and who, to those with whom he inhabits, imparteth them yet more and more abundantly.

Thus have I largely explained to you the duty of *living peaceably*, and shewn you some of the most effectual methods of performing it. Would to God all that hear me this day would resolve to practise this plain but useful lesson, as fully as I have handled it; and give a remarkable instance of their compliance with the direction of the text, in the choice that is now coming before you: wherein I fear there will be but too much occasion given of trying how far these considerations have had their due weight with you, and made a deep and becoming impression upon you.

Seven years I have from this place admonished, exhorted, besought you. What success these labours of mine have had, He knows best for whose glory they were designed. It will be one sure and comfortable sign to me that they have had some, if it shall appear that the words I have spoken to you to-day are not in vain; if they shall prevail with you, in any measure, to avoid those rocks which are usually split upon in elections, where multitudes of different inclinations, capacities, and judgments, are interested. To which end let me entreat you, that since in these cases

unanimity, and an entire agreement of hearts and voices, is not to be expected, you would, at least, take care to disagree in as decent and friendly, and christian a manner as is possible.

Let not your zeal for any one man's character ever draw you to load and depreciate, and vilify another! Take not up slight reports to men's disadvantage; spread them not, encourage them not, listen not with greediness to them.

Let it be enough, that the unsuccessful lose what they seek after, an opportunity of exercising among you that talent in divine instructions wherewith God has enabled them. Let them not lose, also, as far as in any of you lies, their good name, that great engine of doing good, by which their labours must be made effectual to other persons, in other places, and which, as far as any of you shall endeavour to deprive them of, so far will you endeavour to obstruct the influence of their doctrine, and to make their character useless.

Remember, I beseech you, that your holy contention is about a minister of the gospel of Christ. Carry it not on by a violation of any rules of the gospel; those rules, for the breach of which, if he be a good man (as I question not he will be), he will not thank you, nay will be obliged, by his very post, to reprove you afterwards.

I speak not this to accuse any of you, as if any of these methods had been already practised; but knowing how the passions of men, not under the strong checks and restraints of grace, are apt to work on these occasions, as becomes me, I warn you.

Set an example to the rest of the parishes of this ample city, in the management of such elections as these, to reform the disorders that (God knows) too often attend them. Manifest to the world the reasonableness of your having an interest in chusing your preachers, by the fit and laudable manner in which you make use of it. Be not too stiff and peremptory in your opinions: let those who are (or should be) conscious of their not having all the advantages requisite towards determining their choice in these things, defer somewhat to the judgment of such as are perhaps somewhat better qualified for it. They must judge for themselves, indeed, their souls are con-

cerned; but let them judge with humility and modesty.

Should some little heats arise while the dispute lasts, when it is over, I am confident they will vanish, and all of you will join in paying that person you shall pitch upon, the esteem due to his function, and to his station here; and which, I take this opportunity of telling the world, I have truly received from you.

However, though I have no reason, in any respect, to complain of my entertainment among you, yet nothing would please me better than to hear that your respect and love was, in every instance, increased towards him that is to succeed me; because nothing can be a better evidence of your sincerity in religion, and of your growth in it, than when you grow also in your sincere regards to those who, in a particular manner, belong both to that and you. And it is an infallible sign that the truths of the gospel have not made that impression upon a man's heart and conscience which they ought to do, when the preachers of the gospel have not had that share in his esteem which belongs to the usefulness and dignity of their sacred employment.

And this I take to be so universal a rule as to admit of no exception, at least, I am sure, I never met with any; and it is therefore my hope, I say, that you will always shew yourselves to be a religious people, and under the influence of good principles, by your behaviour toward those whose business it is to *watch over you for good*; which will be one way, I am sure, of securing to yourselves a succession of able and worthy men, as may adorn this place equally by their lives and doctrines, and be a lasting honour and advantage to those who chuse them.

As for myself, with how great imperfection I have performed my duty here, and how far short I have fallen of the important trust committed to me, of instructing and guiding you in the ways of virtue, no body can be more sensible of than I am: however, thus much I take leave to say, that in *simplicity and godly sincerity* I have preached the gospel of Christ among you; directing my discourses always against those vicious principles and practices, which to me seemed most to prevail, and sparing nothing

I observed to be amiss in you, out of regard to men's persons or opinions, or to any worldly consideration whatever.

The infidelity of the age has forced me to dwell often on the great articles and mysteries of our faith, and to explain them largely: but I call God to witness, that I never proposed any explication of these points, never recommended any thing of this kind to your belief, but what I firmly, and from the bottom of my heart, believed myself. The faith I have delivered to you, the faith of the church of England, into which we were all baptised, is, I am entirely satisfied, the same that *was once delivered to the saints*: I hope none of you will be ever invited, by the specious arts and insinuations of heresy, to depart from it. I am sure the profession of it, in all its branches and members, is what, by the grace of God, I intend to live and to die in.

The church you are of is, without doubt, the purest and soundest, the most reasonable and moderate church upon earth; the nearest to the primitive pattern of any, and the most serviceable to our improvement in virtue and godliness: reverence her, I beseech you, in proportion to her worth; quit not her communion for any boasts to more pure and spiritual worship, nor for the amusements of a more glorious and splendid one; for the pretences of those men who make reason their god, without taking in revelation or their guide, or for the extravagant follies and freaks of enthusiasm.

As a sign of your unfeigned respect for her constitution, resort often to her

service, and let your outward behaviour there speak your inward devotion; frequent her sacraments; listen to her instructions from the pulpit; breed up your children in the knowledge of her articles of religion; season them early with a due value for her doctrine and discipline; and satisfy yourselves that this is one of the best legacies you can leave them.

This is what I have always inculcated to you, and had the providence of God continued me longer among you, should have gone on to inculcate still. I can only hereafter wish it, and pray for it, which I will not fail to perform.

Indeed, my particular employment here now ceases, but my relation to you I trust never shall; I shall always cherish the memory of it, and reflect gratefully upon it, reckoning myself yours in some measure, even after my ministerial office here is at end, and being ready to serve any, even the meanest of you, in all the Christian duties and services of which I am capable.

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among them that are sanctified. (Acts, xx. 32.) And may the God of peace (that peace, to the practice of which I have now been exhorting and persuading you); may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will; working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. (Heb. xiii. 20). Amen.

S E C T I O N II.

FROM THE

* SERMONS of THOMAS NEWLIN, M. A.
FELLOW of MAGDALEN COLLEGE in OXFORD.

S E R M O N I.

The Esteem that attends the constant Practice of Virtue.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, at Magdalene College, on St. John Baptist's Day, 1713.]

St. MARK, vi. 20.

For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy—

ST John the Baptist having constantly spoken the truth, and boldly rebuked vice, (to complete his character) had the honour of suffering for the truth's sake.

His strict and inflexible justice, his ardent zeal for the glory of God, and his avowed hatred of sin, stirred up a powerful enemy against him, and provoked the keen resentment of Herodias, who was engaged in a vitious alliance with Herod, and had therefore a mighty influence over him. We may reasonably believe that the preacher of repentance, had frequently alarmed her conscience with unacceptable reproofs, and quickened it with a sense of guilt, and an expectation of vengeance: she that had been accustomed to hear only *smooth things* (Isa. xxx. 10.), was unable to bear his ingenuous behaviour, (which she called presumption) and resolved to leave nothing undone, till she had wrought her revenge upon him: she used all the arts of insinuation and methods of address, which were likely to win upon Herod, the partaker of her sins; and since their cause was the same, and the supposed injury was common to both, it might be imagined, that he would be as ready to

take away the life of St. John, as she was to desire this gratification of her passion; that she could not make a more agreeable request, and that he only waited for an opportunity of granting it.

But the holy Scriptures assure us, that though *she had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him, she could not. For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy—* (Mark, vi. 19, 20.)

The rays of divine goodness in St. John, shone with an awful lustre; and the beauty of holiness recommended itself, even to Herod, notwithstanding that his favourite lusts pleaded earnestly against it, and Herodias was always at hand, endeavouring to hinder its efficacy by her importunate complaints, and ensnaring suggestions.

She did at last, indeed, surprize the adulterer into a compliance, by the pleasing artifices of her daughter, and obtained a general grant, when he was best disposed to hearken to any demand.

He that had observed his impartial reprover, and *when he heard him, did many things, and heard him gladly* (Mark, vi. 20.), he was not aware of the ill use that was afterwards made of the advantage that he had rashly given against him; and as soon as he perceived it, he repented of it.

Though he freely promised to gratify the daughter of Herodias, with whatsoever she could ask, *even to the half of his kingdom* (Mark, v. 23.), he was yet grieved, when she asked for the head of John the Baptist: *The king was exceeding sorry, yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her.* (Mark, v. 26.) He would have

* The great scarcity of these Sermons, as well as their excellence, has induced the Editor to insert them in this Collection.

receded from his promise, had he not mistaken the force of the obligation, for he valued the life of this just and holy man more than *even the half of his kingdom*.

From hence we may raise this observation, That integrity gains the esteem, even of the vicious and profane, and constrains them to reverence the man that goes on in a steady course of righteousness.

And this may be derived from the following reasons :

First, From the established notions, and natural sense of good and evil :

Secondly, From the excellence, and superiority which virtue has over vice :

Thirdly, From the likeness it bears to the divine attributes :

Fourthly, From the beautiful simplicity of truth and innocence ; and,

Lastly, From the impartial judgment which wicked men make of things, in their sober intervals, and whenever they are brought to themselves.

And first, It may be derived from the established notions, and natural sense of good and evil. As men are distinguished from the rest of the creation, by one common principle of reason, so they, all, form the same conceptions of vice and virtue, before they are tainted with error, or misled by the corruption of their nature. The lines of their duty are so deeply engraven on their minds, that they cannot utterly erase them, unless their whole frame were also to be dissolved. They may indeed fully the light of reason, and partly wear away the impression that was made upon them. And whilst many retain a just abhorrence of evil, others may endeavour to deceive themselves by embracing a more favourable opinion of it. But yet they have some glimmering imperfect knowledge, to accuse and upbraid them with folly : and though they would cover it with a specious appearance, by *calling evil good, and good evil* (Isa. v. 20.), yet they cannot so pervert their faculties as to support their vain-glorious boasting, with a suitable belief, and think that these things are just as they represent them. Though their wills are depraved and engaged in behalf of sin, yet their judgments cannot so contradict, and be the reverse of themselves. They may be overruled, but will still serve to render them

self-condemned, and to justify the conduct of the righteous.

They would fain conceal this their approbation, and silence their thoughts, with loud laughter, and confident raillery ; but their first sense of things, though not lively enough to be the principle of their own actions, will yet oblige them to pay some regard to those that have acted up to their duty.

And the nature of vice and virtue is not to be changed by their sinful desires, or become subservient to their inclinations ; but the marks that are stamped upon them will last for ever, and the difference between them is too wide to be closed. There is a fixed standard of true worth and goodness, and it is not left to be determined by the uncertain opinions, or the arbitrary wills of men, but it is every where the same ; and virtue is thought praise-worthy, as vice passes for a term of infamy and reproach ; and we are constrained to judge thus of it ; and at the first mention of any act of piety, charity, or self-denial, our minds are pleased with it, and glow with a generous emulation : for we know, that it is warranted by right reason, and by the authority of an all-wise God. When we behold a man beset with temptations, and getting the mastery over them, and subduing himself ; when we observe him sacrificing his interest to his duty, and hazarding all that is dear to him in this world, rather than let go his integrity ; we presently frame an idea of greatness superior to earthly kingdoms and all their fading glories ; and he that in the course of his life is steady in performing the service of God, and never stoops to any sinful compliance, is happy in the esteem of all that know him. Every one yields his approbation, and envy dares not cavil at, or detract from him. Even those profligate wretches, that have abandoned religion and thrown up their pretensions to it, cannot but entertain a just opinion of him : and as often as they look into themselves, and take a view of their own case, they wish that their *last end may be like his* (Numb. xxiii. 10.) ; and they even wish that their life were also like his. They are lost to an affecting sense of the joys and comforts of religion ; but still it extorts a veneration from them ; and they are sometimes forced to reflect, as creatures endued with reason.

And

And the esteem which naturally follows integrity, is derived,

Secondly, From the excellence and superiority that virtue has over vice; and this is infinitely great, and appears at the first view to all that consider it: the former is the perfection, the latter the corruption of nature: and look how different the glory of the angels of God is from the shame of those accursed spirits, that were cast down from the mansions of bliss, into the land of darkness, almost so different is the state of the righteous from that of the wicked. Behold our first parent walking in the garden of Eden, unspeakably happy in his unfulfilled innocence: and behold one of his wretched posterity, sold into the slavery of sin, and under the dominion of his unruly affections; in one we see the disgrace and ignominy of vice; in the other the dignity of virtue.

Nay, we may descend lower than this; and if we compare the condition of the best of men, with that of the worm that crawleth upon the ground; we shall find there is a yet greater distance between the just and holy man, and the vicious and profane, than between the most perfect of mankind, and this mean contemptible creature: for this has kept its appointed place, and fulfils the will of its Creator; whereas the sinner is fallen from his high station, and is become despicable to himself. He that has maintained his integrity, knows that he is endued with a noble greatness of mind, that he is answering the design of his Maker, and is *running the race which is set before him*. (Heb. xii. 1.)

He examines his past actions with inexpressible satisfaction, and delights to observe the beautiful order of his nature; his conscience possessed of its due authority, his reason seated in its throne, and his will and affections paying a cheerful obedience.

And all that live under the influence of his example, second the testimony that his own heart gives him, and ratify his just approbation. His advice is as a law to them, and they study to please him, by an equal regard to their duty: as Job speaks of himself; *unto me men gave ear, and waited, and kept silence at my counsel; after my words they spake not again, and my speech dropped upon them*. (Job. xxix. 21, 22.)

But the man that forgets the dignity of his nature, and descends to the commission of a sin, is conscious that he has done an injury to his faculties, and an action that is a disgrace to him, and for which he shall call himself a fool for ever. He is abashed at the remembrance of it, and confounded at the ungrateful thought: and whilst he has any value for his honour, he would be ignorant (if possible) of his sin, shut out himself from being a spectator of it, and would not that his *left hand* should *know what his right hand doth*. (Matt. vi. 3.)

And much more is he afraid of the just and holy man: for his integrity is a reproof to him: it cuts him to the heart with a sense of his shame, puts him in mind of the glory that he has forfeited, and brings his reason and conscience to witness against him. His established virtue rebukes him, like those faithful monitors, and by shewing him how he ought to live, condemns him for not living as he ought.

When innocence appears, vice is ashamed and would conceal itself, as the multitude of sinners will desire to do at the last day, when they shall not be able to lift up their heads to behold *the Sun of righteousness* (Mal. iv. 2.) coming forth in his full strength, and his *saints sitting on thrones to judge the world*. (Luke, xxii. 30.)

There needs no loud declamation against vice, when virtue displays itself with boldness: its presence checks the confidence of sin; and the sinner looks down with confusion of face: his guilt reproves itself, and cries out, in the words of Ahab, *Hasst thou found me, O mine enemy?* (1 Kings, xxi. 20.) He is seized with a prevailing awe, and his mouth is stopped while the goldly are in his sight. Hence it is, that the patrons of irreligion suspend the commission of their beloved iniquity in the presence of a good man.

They forbear for a while the language of blasphemy and profaneness, and by an involuntary veneration, are withheld from evil. Were they in the company of those that are equally regardless of God, they could glory in their wickedness, and vaunt themselves against the Most High. But they dare not be thus vile before the man of integrity, whose frowns are terrible to them, and who chastises them for their impiety, barely by not partaking with it. Before such a witness, they take

up the profession of religion, and would borrow the reputation that certainly attends it. And this respect which righteousness commands, arises,

Thirdly, From the likeness it bears to the divine attributes. It is a token of God's especial presence, that sheds a glory upon him, that daily aspires to a nearer resemblance of his holiness. Every good action is a copy of one or other of those perfections which God has manifested to us : and he that is distinguished by an unmoveable resolution to do his duty, and by repeated conquests of the most inviting temptations, has something truly great and godlike in him, that engages our observation and bespeaks our esteem : and those faithful servants of God, that are adorned with the beams of his goodness, are also clothed with majesty, and it is their defence and protection ; for even their enemies see certainly that the Lord is with them (Gen. xxvi. 28.), and desire to be joined in the same interests that they may partake of God's blessing. It was this that obtained mercy for Joseph, when he was falsely accused, and cast into prison ; and this, together with the working of God's providence, gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison (Gen. xxxix. 21.). This preserved his chosen people, and suffered no man to do them wrong, as they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people (Psal. cv. 13, 14, 15.) ; for God did by this, as it were, speak unto them, *Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.* And they that have designed to injure the righteous man, and been armed with power to execute their purpose, have been prevented by a surprising dread, which has bid them *have nothing to do with that just man* (Mat. xxvii. 19.). The thought of the intended villany has shocked them ; and his invincible virtue has taken away the strength of their resolutions. And they were astonished as Jacob was, when he awaked out of his sleep, and said, *Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not ; how dreadful is this place ! This is none other but the house of God ; this is the gate of heaven.* (Gen. xxviii. 17.) When integrity has stood unshaken against the utmost efforts of the ungodly, their hatred is vanquished ; and they do justice to him that has maintained it, with certainly *this is a righteous man* (Luke, xxiii. 47.). A powerful

sinner has been afraid of his bold reprover, and a licentious judge has trembled before his prisoner. For religion disarms and strikes an awe upon its enemies ; and it dazzles and confounds them, as the light from heaven did St. Paul, as he was journeying to Damascus (Acts, ix. 3.), to persecute the church of God.

It is a lively proof of God's power over the minds of men, that, even they that hate him, cannot withhold the respect and esteem that are due to the resemblance of him ; and as soon as they see his image and superscription, they cannot but render unto God the things that are God's (Mat. xxii. 20, 21.).

And the most obdurate prejudice is pierced through by the beautiful simplicity of truth and innocence, which is,

Fourthly, to be considered. How much soever mankind may disagree in other matters ; how unwilling soever they may be to agree in this ; yet they with one consent, acknowledge the excellence of truth, and the real worth of innocence. Sincerity gains access, by its natural efficacy ; it needs no arts to recommend it ; but is therefore most acceptable, because it is without art or design.

There is no character more desirable, more generally beloved, than that of a plain honest man : it enters into the hearts of all with an irresistible force, like the gospel of Christ, which obtained a ready assent to itself, by its glaring evidence : it was not set off with a pompous shew of eloquence, or the enticing words of man's wisdom (1 Cor. ii. 4.) ; but trusted to its own power, and appeared as it really was, in a simple unaffected narration.

An impartial regard to truth, and a steadfast resolution of doing our duty, are infinitely more valuable in themselves, than all the acquired ornaments, and the most fashionable rules of conversation ; and a good man has something truly engaging in his deportment, that pleases more effectually than the plausible civilities and seeming courtesy of the fine gentleman, and the ensnaring embraces and fair promises of the courtier.

The world may sometimes think him their enemy, because he tells them the truth (Gal. iv. 16.), and may caress the flatterer, that distinguishes away their guilt, and covers their vices with a softer name.

But they hate the former only whilst they

they are enemies to themselves, and employ the latter, just while he gives them a little ease, and lulls them into a deceitful security. But there is nothing more odious than flattery; and whilst it labours to conceal its baseness, it shews the excellence of truth, and confesses, that it is amiable in the eyes even of a prejudiced spectator; for it puts on the appearance of it, and studies to be unlike itself; for the mind, though vicious and depraved, cannot relish fulsome and undisguised flattery, but rejects it with abhorrence. And the sinner looks down with contempt upon the despicable wretch that prostitutes his reason to the service of a lie, and renders himself the most vile and abject of creatures, to form a transitory interest, or purchase a forced and pretended approbation.

Such is the value of truth, that they that deviate from it must seem to adhere to it; and the most skilful flatterer tries to persuade the person he commends, that he has certainly those virtues, which he falsely ascribes to him: his commendation is as nought, unless it passes for truth, and his designs are disappointed, unless he is believed. How far preferable then is truth, which stands on a sure foundation, and does not court an uncertain opinion, a precarious esteem; which always pleases, when the mind sees it as it is, and which prepares and forces the way to acceptance, even through the grossest prejudice.

Which leads me, lastly, to derive the observation on the text, from the impartial judgment that wicked men make of things in their sober intervals, and whenever they are brought to themselves.

Their sins having the ascendant over them, are generally regarded in the first place; and every thing that offers itself is considered as agreeable to, or inconsistent with them. Their representation is received by the injured faculties of the mind, and it is compelled to assent to their unnatural interpretation: for we (*say they*) *are they that ought to speak, for we are lords over them.* And whilst they are tied and bound in this miserable slavery, the sight of a just and holy man provokes and inflames them; they are galled with his reproofs, and break out into opprobrious language.

Whilst they are warm in the pursuit of their supposed pleasures, they cannot bear

the least interruption, they are too impatient to hearken to reason.

But there are some seasons in which they may be spoken withal: when their affections are cool, and they are wearied with the service of sin, they begin to consider the example that was set before them, the pathetic exhortations of the preacher of righteousness, the holy vehemence with which he applied himself to them, and the affectionate concern wherewith he intreated them. And they think with themselves; Surely he was in earnest; we indeed mocked at his persuasions, and made a jest of our calamity; but now we acknowledge that he spoke the truth, because he was thoroughly convinced of it, and expressed a compassion towards us, out of a sincere regard to us, and a just sense of our danger; we rejected him as our enemy, but we unreasonably accounted him so, since he deals with us no otherwise than with himself, and advises us to act as he believes we ought to do, according to his best judgment of things, and the rule of his own practice; why then should we violate our purest sentiments, by injuring the man who bears a good-will to us, and discharges the most difficult offices of friendship, by rescuing us out of our own hands, and telling us we are enemies to our immortal souls?

These thoughts naturally occur to them, when they are disposed to consider, and make a right estimate of things; then they pay a deference to him that holds fast the truth, and answers its obligations, much rather than to those that have conspired to degrade themselves: and unless they are totally blinded, they will at one time or other endeavour to make amends for their profane jests and railery, by treating the better part of mankind with reverence, and despising those that run into the same excess of riot with them.

Having gone through the several particulars proposed, I am persuaded that you have already drawn such inferences, as arise from them, and have prevented me in the application.

Let me only mention, the great example of righteousness, whom we this day commemorate, and the remarkable effect which his life and doctrine had upon Herod; and you will resolve to keep your integrity, and glory in a brave profession of religion; you will be animated and encouraged by the hopes of bringing piety

into fashion, and putting a stop to the spreading contagion, and the vaunting confidence of sin.

Consider with how swift a progress religion would prevail in the world, were not men ashamed of that which is their greatest glory, were they as bold and resolute in owning the practice of religion, as others are in propagating the corrupt notions and vicious manners of the age.

Consider the powerful influence of holiness, in that Herod feared John, for this very reason, because he was a just man and an holy; when at the same time he was able to banish him from his presence, and procure the quiet enjoyment of his sin. What a mighty efficacy then would holiness have, did those of the highest ranks and fortunes *let their light shine before men* (Mat. iii. 16.), it would be beautifully terrible to the combination of sinners, and chase away immorality and profaneness. Did they know the dignity of virtue, they would not so easily recede from it. They are carried away by the false maxims of honour, and yield to the clamours of a sinful generation; to gain their esteem, and acquire a vain applause.

Whereas the most likely way to be truly approved of men, is, first to be acceptable with God; and did they insist upon, and steadfastly preserve their virtue, the world would be at length brought over to them, and entertain the same sentiments of things.

They only betray themselves, by departing from *the old paths* (Jer. vi. 16.) of virtue, and discover a low contemptible spirit, by a mean compliance and a servile imitation.

Did they adhere to their profession, and adorn it with a suitable practice, they would be admired for their noble resolution, and their example would be esteemed as a law.

And how much more becoming is it to do their duty, and obtain that respect which is derived from the natural sense of good and evil, from the excellence of virtue; from the likeness it bears to the divine attributes; from the beautiful simplicity of truth and innocence, and from the impartial judgment of wicked men, when they are brought to themselves, than to be governed by humour and custom, by the perverse wills, and wild caprice of unreasonable men?

For these are more uncertain than their

own vain breath, and their applause will perish sooner than a blast.

But virtue will recommend us to God's unerring approbation: and what he determines is fixed and certain, for it is done in truth and equity.

And all that have any regard to reason, will second his judgment, and the approbation of our conscience, and even they that behold goodness afar off will admire it. And when the end of all things is come, our character will remain untainted; and God will do honour to us before an innumerable multitude; and there shall be no speech nor language but what shall speak our praise.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for evermore.

S E R M O N II.

The Duty and Advantages of Sincerity.

PSALM XV. 2.

And speaketh the truth from his heart.

THE laws of God are imprinted upon the nature of man, and written in the tables of our hearts. But, alas! we soon deface the impression, and the glorious characters are quickly lost, because they are written but in dust. So great is their value, that they ought to be engraven upon marble with a pen of a diamond. But why do I speak of marble; for that also perishes, and the tables of stone were broken.

But the laws of God shall never fail; his fingers have committed them to a record that shall never be blotted out; and he will preserve them in everlasting characters in the book of life. There every line is a ray of glory, and every branch of our duty is a beam of that sun which shall never withdraw his light.

Till we can read it in that divine original, we cannot desire to behold a fairer copy of it, than appears in the psalm which is now before us. Surely if ever the heart of the Psalmist indited a good matter, if ever his tongue was the pen of a ready writer, it was in this excellent portion of Scripture. In this he surpassed the rest of the children of men; *full of grace were his lips, and they dropped the dew of heaven.*

What

What wisdom may we learn from that important question: *Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle? or who shall rest upon thy holy hill?* And what satisfaction may we receive from that faithful answer which the spirit of God returned to him, or which, through his direction, he returned to himself: *Even he that leadeth an uncorrupt life, and doth the thing which is right, and speaketh the truth from his heart?*

Every word that goes before the text, and every word that follows it, deserves our particular consideration; but let me at this time dwell upon the amiable virtue of truth and sincerity; or rather *let this be our rest for ever; here let us dwell, and have a delight therein.*

That you may ascend to the holy place by speaking the truth from your heart; I shall

First, Endeavour to direct you in the performance of this duty, and

Secondly, To shew the advantages of it.

That you may perform it aright, you should,

1st, Consider the folly and baseness of insincerity.

2dly, You should cleanse your minds from corrupt and vicious thoughts.

3dly, You should possess them with just and honourable principles. And,

4thly, You should speak from the ground of your hearts, without any intention of ensnaring or betraying your neighbour.

And, 1st, you should consider the folly and baseness of insincerity.

Great is the folly of those men that leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness. Their exquisite subtilty serves as often to puzzle and perplex themselves, as to entangle others. They are lost in the intricate maze of deceit, and cannot find a way to escape out of the circle which they have artfully drawn. They make no progress by engaging in indirect courses, but are carried to and fro by their crooked and perverse dealings, like the winding stream, that turns back upon itself, and the swifter it runs, so much the sooner it comes again to its fountain.

The path of the just is as the shining light, to invite and lead them on to happiness; and they that have learnt the wisdom of integrity, are directed by the same

heavenly guide, as *went before the children of Israel in a pillar of fire*, and conducted them safely through the mighty waters, and the barren wilderness. But they that follow their own treacherous policy, and plunge themselves into the depths of iniquity, are led astray by an uncertain guide, that resembles the wandering vapour of the night, which trains on the mistaken traveller, till he falls from a precipice, or sinks into the mire. They cannot fix upon a sure foundation, but are constrained to shift and change their place, *finding no rest for the sole of their foot.*

Their insincerity still wants a veil to cover it; for if it once appears, its sordid designs are defeated. But how hard is it to cover it effectually! Though the disguise be curiously wrought, it will soon be worn out, and require another pretence to conceal its failure: and even the endeavour to conceal it frequently betrays it, and the smoke shews that the flame is stifled.

There can be no peace in this forced unnatural state; fresh disquiets are always rising in the mind; and while the heart is treacherous, the temples of the head can take no rest. For they that are conscious to themselves that they are working mischief, must also be apprehensive of the fatal discovery. Amidst the many cross ways of dishonesty, they know not which to choose, for in every one they expect to meet an adversary. And many indeed there are, as industrious to find them out, as they are to prevent it.

Such is the folly of insincerity, if we consider it with respect only to men: but how much greater is it, since there is an all-seeing God *with whom we have to do!* (Heb. iv. 13.) *his eyes are ten thousand times brighter than the sun, beholding all the ways of men, and considering the most secret parts: he knew all things ere ever they were created, so also after they were perfected he looked upon them all* (Ecclus. xxiii. 29.).

He sees every spring and movement of the heart, and observes every passion that stirs within it, when it is soured with the rancour of settled hatred, preyed upon by the never-dying worm of inveterate malice, swelled and disturbed with envy, or inclined to blast our neighbour's reputation, by calumny and detraction.

No cloud or darkness can screen our thoughts from his view; they would all distinctly appear before him, *though they were*

were more than the sea, and our counsels were profounder than the great deep.

Though our heart were doubled and folded up with the most artful fraud, yet as a vesture he would unfold it.

He despises the admired contrivances of the consummate villain, and laughs him to scorn; *he frustrateth the designs of the liars, and maketh them mad; he turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish* (Isai. xlv. 25.). And insincerity must be allowed to be no less base than foolish, the perfidious themselves being judges.

Every sin casts a blemish and dishonour upon our nature, and covers us with shame and confusion. But this is more especially shameful, and, as it proceeds from a mean, abject spirit, so it writes fear and suspicion upon the face, and sets a mark on the sordid wretch that is guilty of it. He calls for the darkness to spread itself over him, studies to pass unobserved, and lurks in secret places: whilst no one but God and his own soul is privy to his design, he distrusts every step that he takes, and dreads every man that meets him, as if he would proclaim his disgrace.

Even the pretended advocates for honour, declare the baseness of lying and falsehood. For to give a man the lie, is in their esteem an unpardonable affront; a reflection that can be washed out by nothing but blood; an offence that cannot be expiated by any thing, but the sacrifice and death of the offender.

And if the groundless imputation of lying is so foul a blot, how great is the weight of guilt and infamy that falls upon them who deserve the charge! and if they cannot bear to be accused of it without reason, should they not be afraid to give reason for the accusation?

If you consider the persons with whom you deal treacherously, you must necessarily be sensible of the vileness of your proceeding, and look upon the odious practice with loathing and abhorrence.

If they are honest and sincere, as probably they are; for they are the persons that are most easily wrought upon, the least suspicious of your baseness, and therefore the most exposed to it; think with yourselves, how unnatural it is, to make a prey of such ingenuous tempers, and privately injure them, while they innocently breath forth their thoughts, and *pour out their hearts before you.*

Their sincerity bespeaks your tenderest regard, and you offer violence to yourselves, and put off your humanity, when you betray them. They, alas, entertain a kind opinion of you, and persuade themselves, they may safely put their confidence in you. And you (if you are false to them) stab them to the heart, while they are leaning upon your breasts, and knitting their soul with yours. If you can proceed to such villany as this, you may also murder the guest that begs protection for a night under your roof, or you may imbrue your hands in the blood of the harmless infant in the midst of its peaceful sleep.

But supposing that the persons you are dealing with, are themselves insincere, and you flatter yourselves, that you are only acting the defensive part, and fighting with their own weapons, yet even then you are self-condemned. You are provoked by their treachery, and are you therefore treacherous? You justly abhor their practice, and yet imitate the practice you abhor.

The consequences of falsehood are most pernicious in the important affairs of life; and it has also a baleful influence upon our common conversation. It entirely destroys the cheerfulness of it, and strikes an uncomfortable damp upon it: there can be no pleasure in conversing together, if we are always afraid of being betrayed.

And we are exposed to dangers arising from tempers seemingly different. For one man appears free and open, and encourages us to speak in the same free and open manner. His design in the mean time is base, to take off the restraints of caution that keep us in safety, and to draw us off from our guard, as the subtle commander advances and offers battle, that he may encourage his adversary to leave his places of strength, and fight to his disadvantage.

Another man lies on the reserve to watch for every slip and failing, and make a dishonest use of those indiscretions which he observes, and yet does not seem to observe, in others. Thus we fall into the hands of those that lie in wait for us, and are compassed about with enemies where none were expected.

Dreadful was that state of war which impious men have falsely supposed to be the state of nature: yet it were better for

us to live in that dreadful state, always apprehensive of open violence, than to be always liable to be surprized by secret treachery.

Wretched is the condition of that people, whose tongue is an arrow shot out, it speaketh deceit: one speaketh peaceably to his neighbour with his mouth, but in heart he layeth his wait (Jer. ix. 8.).

That you may never incur this heinous charge, but may copy after him, in whose lips there was found no guile, you should, secondly, cleanse your minds from corrupt and vicious thoughts. For if the fountain be clean, the streams that flow from it will be pure from sin; but if this be corrupt, it will send forth the waters of bitterness, and taint the whole course of your actions.

The heart is the root and foundation either of good or evil; and if this be unfound, and has a canker lurking within it, you cannot safely rely upon it: and how fair soever your professions are, they are no more than an empty pretence, or a specious covering, that makes a shew for a time, and then, like blasted fruit, turns to decay.

As therefore you would deal sincerely with one another, you should carefully put away every unreasonable prejudice against your neighbour: for prejudice perverts the judgment, and misguides the will, and gives an evil tincture to all your thoughts, words, and actions.

Envy is another pernicious quality, that disposes men to perfidious dealing, and inclines them to lay trains and snares to injure the person that is the object of it.

And malice is always engaged in the strictest alliance with falsehood; and as they are the distinguishing characters of the accursed spirit, so they have the most prevailing influence over the vile wretched man that delights in the subtle arts of doing mischief.

And though they may seem less dangerous, yet you cannot too strictly guard against an arrogant opinion of your own wisdom, and a vain contempt of the simplicity of others. For these have prevailed with many to double and prevaricate, who yet were above the sordid temptations of avarice, and had no other motive to it, but only a fond opinion of their shrewd, dextrous conduct.

It is this that has moved them to practice upon the easy credulity of well-meaning men; to open their hearts by the false key of crafty insinuations, and to make the basest use of the confidence which is unwarily put in them. It is this that has filled them with an ill-natured pleasure, when they have taken the ignorant in the snares which they have curiously wrought, and made them insensible of the nets that are cast about them.

But amidst the many evil thoughts that corrupt the mind, you ought most especially to beware of those that tend to covetousness. For if this vice has gotten the dominion over you, it will tempt you not only to betray your brother, but to sell your soul.

It was this that influenced the accursed Judas, when he reproved Mary for anointing the feet of Jesus with very costly ointment, and pretended that it might be better employed, if it were sold, and the price of it given to the poor. This he said not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bore what was put therein (John, xii. 5, 6.).

And it was this that had a fatal effect upon him, when he betrayed his friend and his saviour by a kiss, and delivered himself to perdition for thirty pieces of silver (Mat. xxvi. 15.).

This, I hope, is sufficient to engage you to cleanse your minds from corrupt and vicious thoughts, and, in the third place, to possess them with just and honourable principles.

And one of the best principles that can be fixed and planted in you, is a sincere value for truth; and a due regard to your word.

Truth naturally recommends itself to the mind, and appears with an amiable beauty, though it has no other charms but its own simplicity. This virtue is most especially sweet to the soul, and demands your love and veneration with a mighty force and authority. And its authority should be held as sacred for ever; no corrupt breath should taint it, no faithless tongue should violate it. By its bands the members of society are held together; and every other tie must fail, and all relations be dissolved, if this be destroyed.

Without this there is no safety in commerce, no pleasure in conversation, no dependance

dependance upon friendship, no valuable alliance even in blood.

And if you have a just value for yourselves, you cannot but regard your word. And it is then highly worthy of the regard of others, when truth is stamped upon it.

The tongue is then a glorious member; and the faculty of speech is applied to the noblest use, when it faithfully conveys so rich a treasure.

The words of truth are like the purest metal bearing the royal image. And they are not questioned and received with suspicion and distrust, but pass with undoubted authority, and gain entire credit, as soon as it is known *what image and superscription they bear*.

A generous scorn and abhorrence of falsehood is another principle almost as powerful as a just value for truth. For it has often happily restrained men from the base practices of deceit, though they have fallen a prey to other temptations; and though many vices have taken possession of them, yet they have withheld themselves from perfidious dealing, because they loathed and disdained it. And where conscience seems to have lost its power, generosity and honour have in some measure supplied its place, and forbid them to do a dishonest action.

And there is certainly a respect due to those in whom there are these remains of virtue: and though they ought to be blamed for being enemies to themselves, in committing other sinful actions, yet we should give them their deserved praise (and much they certainly deserve) for abstaining from *the sins of unfaithfulness*.

If you possess yourselves with benevolence and humility, these principles also will engage you to be strictly just. They will incline you to serve your brethren with cheerfulness, and promote their interest with fidelity.

While you preserve a tender concern for them, and are stedfastly resolved to perform every good office that lies in your power, no villainous thought can enter into your breast, no arts of deceit can gain access to you. For these proceed from malice and ill-nature, and cannot be entertained with pleasure by any one that does not delight in doing mischief.

But while you endeavour to make every man your friend, and to shew yourselves

friends to every man, you cannot secretly violate their interest, or conceive a thought of being false and injurious to them, without indignation. Since the *mouth speaketh out of the abundance of the heart*, you should enrich it with virtuous principles, and furnish it with the treasures of goodness; and then you will,

Fourthly, speak from the ground of your hearts, without any intention of enslaving or betraying your neighbour. This alone can raise you to the character that is drawn by the psalmist; if your words proceed from the depth of your heart, and are directed to a good end.

For this comprehends every thing that is valuable in speech; and without this, your words are either trifling, or heinously evil: for unless the heart guides you, they are slight and superficial, and no more than the vain froth and overflowing of the lips; they are of no use or signification; and happy were it, if they were regarded as little, by him that hears, as by those that speak them.

But this is the least abuse of words, and not to be compared with the guilt of those that flow from a base and treacherous design.

In discharging the duty of sincerity, it is not necessary to speak the whole truth in every place, and lay open the entire state of your mind to every one that desires to look into it. We ought to keep a guard upon it, and communicate no more of it than is consistent with prudence and safety.

It is sufficient to open the first room in our hearts, to those with whom we are but imperfectly acquainted, and to let them in farther by degrees, as our intimacy and friendship are gradually improved.

When an insinuating spy is observing our conduct with an evil curiosity, we should take care to disappoint his traitorous intentions, and not rashly disclose our thoughts, as *Hezekiah shewed the house of his precious things, the silver, the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures, to the servants of the king of Babylon* (Isai. xxxix. 2.). The safest and the justest way of acting, in such a case, is to impart nothing but truth, and to conceal nothing with an insincere and villanous reserve.

But there are many cases in which we

are required to speak the whole truth, and we should not keep back any part of it, or cover it with any disguise, or blend it with any corruption.

As it is pure in itself, and without any alloy, we should deliver it *with singleness of heart*, and imitate *the multitude of them that first believed in Christ, who were of one heart and one soul* (Acts, iv. 32.).

When a positive promise is made, the nature of it should be fully considered: it gives the person to whom it is made, an absolute right to the thing that is promised: and to deny it him utterly, is a palpable injury; to withhold it longer than the time appointed, or put it off from day to day, is an unnatural cruelty, and a barbarous abuse of the expectation which we have raised and encouraged.

Perhaps his whole dependance rests upon it, and every disappointment tortures and afflicts him.

The heart is a joint-witness with God, and if it retracts or disowns the engagement, it contradicts the testimony of him, who will prove and confirm it, by infinite vengeance.

When we endeavour to recommend ourselves to each other by professions of kindness, we should really bear the kindness we profess: for unless this accompanies them, they are but as *clouds without water, and trees without fruit*. This is their best estate!

But if they are made not only without kindness, but with a wicked intention to ensnare the man that believes them, and accomplish his ruin, which cannot be so effectually brought to pass by open enmity, they are then *like to whitened sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness* (Matt. xxiii. 27.). And they also in another respect resemble *the tombs which were inhabited of old by them that were possessed of devils*.

We cannot take too much care that our professions be sincere; for as they naturally rise to a higher degree, they will accordingly be attended by greater aggravations, if they proceed from a deceitful heart.

Then only may we trust ourselves, and be believed by others, when they are what they seem to be, and deserve the credit which we desire to obtain.

That you may *speak the truth from your*

heart, I shall secondly shew the advantages of this duty. And it is no small advantage of it, that it gains us esteem, and gives force and authority to all our dealings.

Considering the mutual benefits that we enjoy, as members of society, we cannot but delight to pursue the means that convey those benefits to us. Nothing does more effectually convey them, than the trust and confidence which is put in us. Nothing confirms that trust and confidence more than a good reputation. And nothing more certainly gives us a good reputation than the experience of our honesty and integrity.

Even those that have too little regard to truth and sincerity in their own practice, are yet constrained to admire it in others, and are best satisfied in themselves, when they deal with a faithful man, and commit their most important concerns to a breast that will not betray them.

If we pass from the necessary affairs of life to the innocent pleasures of our ordinary conversation, even those pleasures derive all their sweetness from sincerity: when we are wearied with the business of the day, and are willing to refresh ourselves with the conversation of our friends and acquaintance; how agreeable and delightful is the refreshment, when there is no suspicion of falsehood, no danger of opening our minds too far, no fear of being taken in the snares of perfidious men!

Our happiness may then be compared to that of our first parents, when they walked forth in the garden of *Eden*, the air being pure and untainted, and the flowers breathing forth innocent odours.

Great also is the advantage of sincerity, in giving or receiving counsel or advice: and this is absolutely necessary to direct each other through the dangerous wilderness of this world: it fills us with comfort and *joy unspeakable*, to meet with a faithful friend, that leads us in the right way, or fairly tells us that we have departed from it.

When the mind is distracted with uncertain and perplexing thoughts, how seasonable and welcome are those admonitions which proceed from an honest heart, and a full purpose of promoting our welfare! They are as agreeable and refreshing as the *streams that flowed from the stony rock*. And while we enjoy them,

our case is like that of *the woman of Samaria* when she conversed with the blessed Jesus, who *was able to give her a well of water springing up into everlasting life* (John, iv. 14.).

But how dreadful are the consequences of false and insincere advice ! It leads us into straits and difficulties, that we may perish in them ; as the thief and murderer directs the ignorant traveller into the narrow passages, that he may surprise and murder him there.

And when we are compelled to dwell in the tents of unfaithfulness, we are as miserable as those that are compassed about with the pestilence ; when the very air they breath in, spreads the infection, and the fountains that should quench their thirst, inflame it.

But hoping better things of you, I shall farther endeavour to recommend sincerity, as it engages the good-will of mankind, and inclines them to favour and protect the man that holds fast his integrity. The influences of it are very extensive, and reach even to them that do not practise the virtue ; it restrains their hands from violence, and forbids them to injure so sacred a character.

And the satisfaction that possesses our minds, the pleasure that rises within us, is a yet stronger inducement to this duty. Since we cannot but reflect upon our past conduct, it nearly concerns us so to live, that we may delight in our reflections. Every virtue does indeed conduce to it, but none more effectually than sincerity.

When we look into our breasts, how comfortable is it, to find no accursed thing to trouble us, no base perfidious thought to rise in judgment against us, no dishonest action to upbraid us !

The pure and virtuous soul that is adorned with sincerity, appears like *the beauty of holiness*, or the *tabernacle of God*, when his glory rested upon it : or (if we may bring any thing into comparison with the innocent Jesus) we might compare it with *the Lamb of God*, in that glorious view, when *the Holy Spirit was seen descending like a dove, and lighting upon him* (Matt. iii. 16.).

With what joy and triumph did the faithful Samuel appeal to the whole assembly of Israel, when he was old and grey-headed, and had walked before them from his childhood to that day !

And how fully was the voice of his

conscience confirmed, by the united voice of the people : *Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, nor taken aught of any man's hand* (1 Sam. xii. 4.).

Our rejoicing is this (says the great Apostle St. Paul) *the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God we have had our conversation in the world* (2 Cor. i. 12.).

What peace did he speak to himself ! with what courage did he speak to his flock ! *Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe.* (2 Thess. ii. 10.)

So many are the advantages of sincerity in this world, that it is almost unnecessary to draw any arguments from the other. But if they are great, as it possesses the mind with peace, and brings down heaven to us, how much greater are they, as it raises us to heaven !

And this we are assured it will, for *he that speaketh the truth from his heart, shall dwell in the tabernacle of God, and rest upon his holy hill.*

In this present state we see each other, but through a glass darkly, and can pass only uncertain judgments, and make but slight conjectures.

But in the other, we shall see God himself face to face, and be liable to no mistake, since we shall always behold *the fountain of light*. It was the particular happiness of St. John, to lean upon our Saviour's breast, at his last supper upon earth. But if we tread in his steps, we shall lie for ever in his bosom in heaven.

And he will perfectly reveal to us, the delightful truths, which he spake with his mouth, and which fell from those lips, in which there was no guile.

We shall converse with the spotless souls, which were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God and unto the Lamb. (Rev. xiv. 4.). We shall enjoy the friendship of angels and arch-angels, who delight to proclaim their good-will to men.

And the heavens shall open to receive us into the company of the blessed Nathaniel, and all other true Israelites in whom there was no guile (John, i. 47.).

Having endeavoured to direct you in the practice of sincerity, and shewn the advantages of it, let me leave the whole upon your thoughts in the words of St. Paul.

Finally, my brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think of these things; and the God of peace shall be with you (Phil. iv. 8, 9.)

SERMON III.

The Promise of a Comforter considered.

[Preached at Magdalene College, in Oxford, on Whitsunday.]

JOHN, xiv. 16.

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.

WHEN our Saviour's departure was nigh at hand, he began to prepare the minds of his disciples for their approaching trial, and to alleviate their affliction, at the seeming loss of their best friend, with promises of comfort and support, equal to the sharpest conflicts.

Having assured them that he would grant whatsoever they should ask in his name, for their own real advantage and the propagation of his gospel; and having done enough to deserve the most ardent love, and engage all their affections, he requires one distinguishing proof of their sincerity: *If ye love me, keep my commandments (John, xiv. 15.)*

To reward their endeavours, and to enable them to perform yet more and more, he adds, *And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.*

It was expedient for them that he himself should go away; for if I go not away, says he, *the Comforter will not come unto you (John, xvi. 7.)*. According to the order of God's dispensations, it was requisite that he should first ascend into the heavens, and then the third person in the blessed trinity, should come down to make a lasting abode with them. And our Saviour speaks as if the Holy Ghost would not only supply his place, but render his presence of most advantage to them.

He knew the frailty of their nature, the concern they must lie under, when they were scattered abroad, as sheep without a

shepherd, and the great work he had designed them for, and the difficulties they must encounter in the discharge of it; and therefore he promises to apply himself to his Father, agreeably to the office he had undertaken, and to pray for them, that he would send down his Holy Spirit, who was qualified to succeed the Messiah in his ministry here on earth, as he was equally God blessed for ever, and who would perfect the work, which, in his infinite wisdom, he was pleased to leave unfinished; for he tells them, *I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now: howbeit, when he the Spirit of truth shall come, he will guide you into all truth (John, xvi. 12, 13.)*. And to render his presence more than an equivalent for that of their Saviour in the flesh, he was to abide with them for ever.

The word which is rendered comforter, signifies also an advocate, and exhorter, in all which capacities the Holy Spirit was promised to the Apostles, and in them to all the world. In considering the extent of this promise, I shall have a regard to each of these senses.

First, As he was an advocate, an exhorter, and a comforter to the Apostles.

Secondly, To the Christians of all ages, which will bring me,

Thirdly, To shew in what respects he was to abide with them for ever. And,

First, He was an advocate, an exhorter, and a comforter to the Apostles. The Christian religion, though fully ratified by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, did not recommend itself to the world, till the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were shed on the preachers of it. And considering the prejudices of mankind, which are hardly to be pierced through by the brightest evidence; considering the sacred authority of the Jewish religion, the pretended antiquity of the heathenish superstitions; the prevailing power of sin, and the established dominion of Satan: it could not be expected, that the gospel should be easily received, which required an utter enmity with sin; which discovered the folly of the heathen sages, and the gross errors of their idolatry; and which boasted of more perfection than the law of Moses.

And had there been none of these objections against it, had the gospel itself been agreeable to the blind zeal, the vain opinions, and the supposed interest of

men;

men; yet the persons chosen to publish it, had been thought to cast a slur upon it; and a few illiterate fishermen could not have gained an entrance into the palaces of princes; and a favourable hearing from the pride of courts; they could not have persuaded the masters of Israel to learn instruction, or wrought the admired oracles of the Gentiles, into an opinion, that even they could teach them wisdom.

But when the truth itself was unacceptable, and the persons appointed to preach it, could only lessen it in the eyes of a vain-glorious world; nothing but the divine assistance could sufficiently recommend them; nothing but the working of God on the minds of men could reconcile them to the way *which was every where spoken against* (Acts, xxviii. 22.).

As it was unlikely that the Apostles should succeed in their endeavours, barely by their natural strength, and weak capacities; so they would scarcely have attempted any thing when it was a work of toil and danger, and appeared very difficult, if not impossible, to perform.

We must suppose them subject to the same passions with other men, to have the same tender apprehensions of evils; and, as they could not rush upon them without fear, so they were not ignorant of the consequences of speaking in the name of Jesus. For their Lord and Master had given them a dreadful warning, and a lively representation of that scorn, malice, and cruelty, which they should firmly expect, and certainly undergo.

And their sense of these calamities must be heightened, by the pleasing mistake, that they had long entertained, in common with the rest of the Jews, that they should enjoy the greatest happiness in the temporal kingdom of the Messiah. Their condition, therefore, required, that *the Spirit of God should rest upon them* (Isa. xi. 2.); and, in compassion to their infirmities, and for the general good of mankind, his sacred fire descended to purify and enlighten their minds, to kindle nobler thoughts, and better conceptions of things.

And such were its effects, that they were not ashamed to maintain the cause of the crucified Jesus, and glory in being the disciples of a supposed malefactor. Animated by a divine principle, and filled with spiritual life, they despised tortures and death, and the impotent contempt

and scornful boasting of the professors of worldly wisdom. Being assured that they had a faithful advocate to plead for them, they neglected the usual preparations, and ordinary methods of defence, and yet durst to engage with the chief of their adversaries, that were trained up in the arts of fallacious reasoning, and qualified to ensnare the innocent. They depended on God's assistance in the needful time, in the article of danger; for their Saviour engaged himself to support them. *When they bring you unto the synagogues and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say; for the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say* (Luke, xii. 11, 12.). Thus they went into the midst of great multitudes; and though there were numbers to overpower, and clamour to silence, though there was wit to deride, artifices to baffle, and threatnings to discourage them, yet they spoke the truth of God, answered the objections, rejected the scoffings, and wiped off the calumnies of their accusers.

And as this their advocate enabled them to speak in the behalf of a persecuted religion, and endued them with such measures of strength, that though *the heathen raged, and the people imagined a vain thing; though the kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord, and against his Christ, yet they broke their bonds in sunder, and cast away their cords from them* (Psalm. ii. 1, 2, 3.); so he turned the hearts of men in favour of them, and *made their enemies be at peace with them* (Prov. xvi. 7.). By his secret operations, he changed the bent and disposition, even of the perverse and stubborn Jew, reconciled the teachers of philosophy to the doctrines of the cross, which they once called *foolishness* (1 Cor. i. 23.), and gained many profelytes to a pure and holy religion, in the courts of heathen emperors, and out of the nearest kindred of cruel and unrelenting tyrants.

Even they that *denied the Holy One, and killed the Prince of Life* (Acts, iii. 14, 15.), were of the multitude of them that were afterwards joined to the disciples.

Whilst the chief priests and elders took counsel to slay them, Gamaliel a Pharisee, a doctor of law, that was had in reputation among the people (Acts, v. 34.), allayed

the fury that was kindled against them, by persuading his brethren, to beware, *lest they should fight against God* (Ver. 39.).

The keeper of the prison came and fell down before Paul and Silas his prisoners, and *washed their stripes* (Acts, xvi. 29. 33.), which perhaps he himself had given them.

And the ministers of torture were softened into pity, at the point of execution, and would become partakers of their sufferings, rather than inflict them on the disciples of Jesus.

Through the same blessed Spirit, the successors of the Apostles were first admitted into the presence of the emperors, and then offered such apologies to them as suspended the hottest persecutions, and almost prevailed with them to repeal the edicts published against the Christians.

Such was the force and mighty influence of these apologies, that *they subdued kingdoms, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, and took away the edge of the sword* (Heb. xi. 33, 34.).

A second office of the Holy Spirit, was to stand by the Apostles, and exhort them to pass cheerfully through this vale of sorrow, and go on in the discharge of their duty, when the terrors of a thousand deaths were set in array against them. Such is the frailty of our nature, that it seemed to want a support, even when Almighty God had taken it upon him.

He that could have commanded *legions of angels* (Mat. xxvi. 53.) to fight for him, was pleased to permit one of that glorious order to attend him, in his agonies in the garden; and to shew, that as man, he was moved at the sight of that *bitter cup* (Luke, xxii. 43.) which was mixt for him, *there appeared an angel unto him from heaven strengthening him* (Mat. xxvi. 56.). And the disciples, that *forsook him and fled*, were infinitely more liable to fail, were in a more pressing want of such aids as would be sufficient for them.

And their master poured out his grace in great abundance upon them, and considered the difficulties attending their high calling. And as often as they were required to appear on an extraordinary occasion, they were sensible of the immediate presence, and received the dictates of the Holy Ghost.

They were released out of prison, that they might preach before those that had

cast them into it, and by a message from Heaven, were commissioned to go, *stand, and speak in the temple, to the people, all the words of this life* (Acts, v. 20.).

When the question was put to them, *Did not we straitly command you, that you should not teach in this name* (Ver. 28.)? they answered, pursuant to the divine command, *We ought to obey God rather than men* (Ver. 29.). He presented unto them opportunities of publishing the gospel, and exhorted them to offer the means of salvation to such as would accept of them.

Thus when *an eunuch of great authority under Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians, was returning from Jerusalem, sitting in his chariot, and reading Isaiah the prophet, the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot* (Acts, viii. 27, 28, 29.); and such was the success of his preaching, that the eunuch declared, that *he believed that Jesus Christ was the Son of God* (Acts, viii. 37.).

Thus also in the case of *Cornelius the Centurion* (Acts, x.), by the direction of the same Spirit, several circumstances concurred to prepare him for his conversion, and to dispose St. Peter to bring the glad tidings of salvation to him and his household. The Gentiles were inclined to seek him, and he was persuaded to comply with their request.

When St. Paul, by the guidance of the Spirit, departed to Corinth, *the Lord spake unto him by night in a vision: Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace, for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city* (Acts, xviii. 9, 10.).

And when he had *born his name among the Gentiles*, he tells his followers, *I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me; but none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God* (Acts, xx. 22, 23, 24.). It was the Spirit that gave him this view of his sufferings, and enabled him to stand steadfast and unmoveable; which brings me to consider him,

Thirdly, as a comforter; and in this respect the disciples impatiently expected him, in their private character, as they were

were touched with the same sorrows as other men are at the departure of their friend.

It was a severe trial to see their great deliverer, in whom they trusted, with whom they went up and down, and familiarly conversed, *nailed to a cross, and numbered with the transgressors* (Isa. liii. 12.). They could not willingly let go their hopes; and their hearts must sink within them, when they were forced to bury them in the grave with their Saviour. And though his resurrection raised up their drooping souls, yet his short continuance on earth, would rather have enhanced than alleviated their affliction, had they been left comfortless for ever, and abandoned and exposed to the cruel mockeries of an insulting world.

But he would *not leave them comfortless*, but promised to *give them such peace as the world could not give* (John, xiv. 27.), and to fill them with unspeakable consolation.

And for this they were waiting with one accord, in prayer and supplication, when on a sudden *they were filled with the Holy Ghost* (Acts, i. 14.—ii. 4.); and his comforts not only *wiped away all tears from their eyes* (Rev. vii. 17.), and drew a veil over their past sorrows, but maintained a cheerful composed temper, and a fixed resolution, amidst the sharpest pangs and most exquisite tortures. When they were beaten for glorying in the name of Jesus, *they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name* (Acts, v. 41.). Nay, though the prison doors were opened, they refused to accept of their liberty, and they that imprisoned them, *came and sought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city.* (Acts, vi. 39.)

These spiritual comforts placed them above the power of their enemies, defeated their cruelty, and upheld them with weakness. Had they privily escaped, or been rescued by violence, they that hated them had not known the measure of their own power, and therefore had supposed it greater than it was; they hadattered themselves with a vain imagination, and been swoln with the thought of what they intended. But since they put in execution, stretched out their power to its utmost length, and did the worst that ingenious malice and artful cruelty could invent; and yet all this was too

little to deprive them of their peace and satisfaction; since they saw them smiling upon the face of death, enjoying their punishment, and breathing out their souls in praise and thanksgiving; this must mortify their pride, and be an ungrateful disappointment to them.

And all this was owing to that blessed Spirit that was their advocate to plead for them, their monitor to exhort them, and their faithful friend to comfort them.

These kind offices he performed in behalf of the Apostles: and though their case was extraordinary, yet the same gracious Spirit considers our common necessities; for,

Secondly, The benefits of his intercession, his exhortations, and his comforts, are promised to the Christians of all ages. And,

1st, He is our advocate; as he teaches us to pray, and then makes our requests known to God: we are foolish and ignorant before him, and though we are hardly sensible of any thing in ourselves, but wants and necessities, yet we cannot represent our condition, or offer up such petitions as become wretched indigent creatures.

We understand so little of the things that are before us, that it is dangerous to trust our own desires, and we should be far more miserable than we are, were we not under the care of a wise and good being, that distinguishes between what is really fit for us, and what we unfortunately crave, that with-holds the curses we imprudently call down upon ourselves, and blesses us with frequent denials.

What an unspeakable advantage is this, that God directs our applications to him, before he receives them! Infinite condescension! He frames our prayers, that he may accept of them, and teaches us to ask for such things as he can vouchsafe to grant, and such as are best for us to receive.

These are stupendous instances of mercy, that the first person in the trinity should hearken to us, sinful creatures; that the second should present our petitions at the throne of grace, with the incense of his own perfect obedience, and intreat for the acceptance of them, as a reward of his sufferings; and that the third should join with our spirit, second and enforce our desires, *with groanings which cannot be uttered* (Rom. viii. 26.), put himself in our place, and beg for our

relief, more earnestly, more importunately, than the wretch that is ready to perish does for an alms.

2dly, To qualify us for the blessings of heaven, he exhorts us to do our duty. He abides with us for ever, if we do not constrain him to give us up to our folly. And he continually follows us with persuasives to a good life. Every religious thought, every honest intention proceeds from him; he waits for a proper season of speaking to us, meets us *in the openings of the gates* (Prov. i. 21.), and at every turning; lays such trains of occurrences, as are most likely to allure us to do our duty, recommends the happy opportunity of saving our souls, and endeavours to prepare our minds, that we may act in the fortunate juncture, in such a manner as will be for our lasting advantage. How often does he whisper to us, *This do and live* (Gen. xlii. 18.); with what care does he sow the seed of God's word in our hearts!

How constantly does he water the tender plant! How does he labour to season our minds with virtue! Do not we often find ourselves struck with some affecting truth? and are we not pleased to see the impression? When we are inflamed with a pious sermon, or a beautiful description of religion, a lively representation of the rewards of righteousness, or the torments of the damned; it is the Holy Spirit that speaks to us by his ministers, that gives the truths of religion their full force and efficacy, that beseeches us to be happy, and with an affectionate concern, persuades us to avoid the way that leads to misery.

And, 3dly, That we may not want any thing that is requisite to bring us to the everlasting enjoyment of himself, he supports us with his comforts; and these he abundantly supplies us with in the time of trial, and after we have strove to gain the conquest. Agreeably to the condition we were designed for here below, he permits us to fall into temptations. But to prevent our yielding to them, he is always ready to help us, and then most especially reaches out himself to us when our case most requires; and if men do not presume too far, or leave their whole business to him, without the least concurrence on their part; he will certainly either remove the temptation, or render their virtue more glorious in triumphing over it. Hence it is that they sometimes maintain

their ground against the most violent opposition, and perceive that they are endowed with greater strength, than they were ever conscious of before. As the evils of this world come fast upon them, *like a wide breaking in of waters* (Job, xxx. 14.), their resolutions are more and more confirmed; and their Almighty comforter bids them stand up undaunted, in the midst of those sufferings, at the expectation of which nature trembled, and the succours of reason were ready to forsake them, and fly away. Hence it is that they have preserved their innocence, though almost every thing else that was dear to them, came in competition with it, and have received the most astonishing tidings of ill fortune, with an easy indifference, a generous contempt, and a noble bravery.

And, after the temptation has attacked them in vain, and they look back with pleasure on the conflict, then it is, that *the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, fills their hearts and minds*. (Phil. iv. 7.) Under his shadow they enjoy a delightful calm; their conscience gives its unerring approbation, and the Spirit witnesses with it; and, from their joint testimony, they derive a firm assurance of inheriting an eternity of bliss. And that we may not think this an ill grounded persuasion, and that the Apostles only had reason to expect such a Comforter, I am,

Thirdly, To shew in what respects he was to abide with them for ever. The persons to whom this promise was made, are to be considered in three capacities, as the disciples of our Lord, as the pastors of his church, and as the representatives of all his followers, in the succeeding ages of Christianity.

As they were the disciples of Jesus, he was to abide with them during their life, which short and uncertain space is here termed for ever; and this, in opposition to the small number of years in which their Saviour had continued with them. He did not manifest himself to them, till he thought it expedient to enter on the public discharge of his ministry, and after he had performed his mighty works amongst them, he was cut off *for the transgressions of his people*; and though he again appeared to them, it was only to stay forty days, to display the glory of his resurrection, to promise them another Comforter, that should abide with them for ever; and then in the presence of them

all, to ascend triumphantly into heaven, that he might give this best of gifts unto men.

That they might not sorrow as men without hope, or be deprived of the enjoyment of this heavenly guest, by fearing the loss of so great a blessing, he was to make himself their constant companion, and to *preserve their going out and their coming in, from that time forth for evermore.* (Ps. cxxi. 8.)

As they were pastors of Christ's flock, all that should succeed them in that sacred office, were with them entitled to the benefits of this last promise of their Saviour. The miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost were indeed peculiar to the first ages of Christianity, and continued no longer than they were necessary for the propagation of the faith; but his assistance was promised to all that were set apart to minister in holy things: their authority is ratified by him: he seconds their endeavours, and gives success to their preaching; and by this gracious influence, our Saviour is still present with us, and if we watch over the people committed to our charge, *teaching them to observe all things whatsoever he has commanded us, lo, he is with us always even to the end of the world.* (Matt. xxviii. 20.)

But there is an infinite treasure of graces and blessings, which are not confined to any age, or to any order of men; and these were promised to the Apostles, as they represented the whole body of Christians. Every one that asks of God in the name of our only Mediator, shall certainly receive the graces of his Spirit. Sincere and fervent prayer is the only condition of obtaining them; and though we are of ourselves weak, helpless creatures, yet if we come rightly qualified to implore the divine favour, we may engage omnipotence in our defence, and as far as our condition requires, God's power will become our own. To encourage our dependance upon him, he has adopted us for his sons; and from the natural affection which parents bear towards their offspring, he teaches us to conclude, that he will do much more for us, than the most tender father will do for his children: *If ye being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him* (Luke xi. 13.)? *We may therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, for we shall obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.* (Heb. iv. 16.)

And though we live at a distance from the time of our Saviour's appearing in the flesh, yet we have *another Comforter, even the Spirit of truth, that will abide with us for ever.*

But let us remember the conditions that will qualify us for his presence; and prepare a place for him in our hearts: Let us cleanse our thoughts, and keep our intentions pure and unspotted, that our prayers may be such as he will approve, such as he will condescend to make known to the Father, and enforce with his powerful intercessions.

Let us hearken to his kind exhortations, and consider, how inexcusable, how ungrateful, how unnatural it is, to disobey his repeated admonitions, when it is for our sakes he speaks to us, when it can be no addition to his own happiness, when the motives he uses to prevail upon us, are the strongest obligations to the practice of virtue, or dissuaves from vice, eternal happiness, or endless misery.

Let us endeavour to answer his important designs in coming down to abide with us. Let us *not grieve his Holy Spirit* (Eph. iv. 30.) who endears himself to us by the name of Comforter, and who is pleased to represent himself as rejoicing with our conscience, and glorying in our conquest over sin.

Let us not have this to aggravate our torments, that we refused to be intreated by God himself, when he vouchsafed to be our companion, our familiar friend, that he might save us.

Let us not chuse the society of accursed spirits, when the Holy Ghost has wooed and besought us, to receive him, and offered to abide with us here on earth, that we might abide with him for ever in Heaven. Amen.

S E R M O N IV.

The Necessity of shewing our Faith by our Works.

JAMES, ii. 19.

Thou believest that there is one God: Thou dost well; the Devils also believe and tremble.

THE proofs of the being of a God strike with so bright an evidence upon the minds of men, that they are constrained to believe, and cannot deny their assent to this great important truth. But the corruption of nature prevails so far; and

and their affections cleave so fast to their vices, that they endeavour to persuade themselves, that the bare belief of a God is sufficient for them; and desire to rest in the profession, without the practice of religion.

And could they obtain this favourable indulgence, we should hear no more complaints of the difficulty of believing; the atheist would give up his admired cavils, and darling objections, and would be contented to renounce his infidelity, if he might still continue in immorality.

The ancient heretics laboured to procure this state of licentiousness, and flattered themselves into an opinion, that they might believe in God, and serve their sins, like the strange nations that were planted in *Samaria, who feared the Lord, and served their own gods.* (2 Kings, xvii. 33.)

The works of the ceremonial law, having been justly proved to be no longer necessary; they argued from thence against the necessity of the moral law. And they concluded that faith alone was so excellent, or even so meritorious, that they might lay their whole stress upon it, and needed no other title to eternal happiness.

To prevent the fatal effects of this erroneous notion, the apostle St. James speaks against it with a becoming warmth, and earnestness of expression, and the utmost force of argument. He shews that *faith without works is dead* (James, ii. 17.); entirely unprofitable, and ineffectual to salvation; and very far prefers the man that *shews his faith by his works*, before him, who *shews his faith without works*. (James, ii. 18.) And at length applying himself to the latter, he offers a dreadful, but certain and weighty truth to his consideration: *Thou believest that there is one God: Thou doest well; the devils also believe and tremble. He commends him for believing; but tells him, the devils also do the same. And if it cannot avail for the abatement of the torments of hell, it can never avail for the attainment of the happiness of heaven.*

That this powerful argument may make a due impression upon us, I shall shew,

First, That the bare belief of a God is ineffectual to salvation. And,

Secondly, That it will serve only to aggravate our guilt, and sharpen our punishment. And,

First, It is ineffectual to salvation, because it is not properly a virtue. It rests in the mind without exerting itself, and lies dormant there, without inclining the will to obey, or bringing the affections into subjection to God. And we may illustrate its weakness and insufficiency, by an obvious and familiar instance. Should a subject acknowledge his sovereign to have a lawful and undoubted right to his crown, and declare it to be his constant opinion, and yet withhold his obedience from him, and refuse to make the due returns for protection: we should certainly think his demands unreasonable if he claimed a place of profit or honour, as a just reward of this vain acknowledgment, and empty declaration. And we should think him yet more unreasonable, if he not only neglected his service, but engaged in rebellion against him; and yet expected that the owning of his title should be esteemed an undeniable plea for pardon.

And if the slight acknowledgment of an earthly sovereign falls short of our duty to him, how much shorter must as slight an acknowledgment fall of our duty to the King of Heaven!

And St. James has fully illustrated the case, in the instance of charity. Though we make the most specious pretensions to that glorious virtue, yet unless we *bring forth fruits worthy of it, it is less than nothing, and vanity. If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and we say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled: and notwithstanding this, give them not those things that are needful to the body; what doth it profit?* (James, ii. 15, 16.) It is not charity, but an insolent sarcasm, that *wexes the soul* of the needy, and *breaks them in pieces with words.* (Job, xix. 2.)

How fatally was the church of Laodicea deceived, when *she said she was rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing, though she was wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked!* (Rev. iii. 17.) Thus are they deceived, who satisfy themselves with believing, that there is an infinitely wise, and just, and holy God, while they offend his wisdom, justice, and holiness.

Moreover, the barren belief of a God is not properly a virtue, because we are almost compelled to believe, there is a God. To assent to a well-attested truth, is not a matter of choice, but rather a necessary

necessary operation of the mind. For truth is its natural object; and when it presents itself, supported by authentic testimony, the mind as readily receives it, as the eye does the light, when it springs forth from its fountain.

We may indeed confine ourselves to a place of darkness, or shut our eyes that the light may not shine in upon them; and we may be so perverse, as to argue, that there is no such thing as light, that it is only a pleasing vision, and exists only in our imagination. But at the same time, we cannot but know, that we obstinately confine ourselves, and suffer violence and torture, that we may not behold the light.

And the same perverseness may tempt us to reject all the proofs of the being of God, and guard every passage to our minds, that no argument may enter into them. And whilst we suspend our reason, and disdain to hearken to the reports even of our senses, we may insolently affirm, that there is no God, and attempt to laugh away the belief of him, as the invention of priestcraft, or the imposition of arbitrary power. But still we unavoidably know that we offer an unnatural violence to ourselves, and can hardly withstand the proofs that surround us, though we scornfully cast them off, with the most inveterate prejudice.

We live in the midst of them; they cry unto us, whithersoever we go, and continually put forth their voice: they appear in the top of high places, by the way, in the places of the paths: they wait for us at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in of the doors (Prov. viii. 1, 2, 3.): they offer themselves to each of our senses, and meet us in every thought. (Wisd. vi. 16.)

If we consider the heavens, and the beautiful order of the moon and the stars, the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work. (Psal. xix. 1.)

If we could go down to hell, and view the prisoners that are held in everlasting chains, the very devils would tell us, there is a God: we should find no Atheists there: for those accursed spirits believe and tremble.

If we behold the dawning of the day, it will proclaim his being to us, for the out-goings of the morning praise him. (Psal. lxxv. 8.) And when the darkness spreads itself over us, our own hearts assure us,

that he maketh darkness, and it is night. (Psal. civ. 20.)

If we think upon the wonders of the great deep, they constrain us to acknowledge him, who lifteth up the waves thereof, and who maketh the storm a calm. (Psal. cvii. 25. 29.)

The time would fail me to speak of the cattle upon a thousand hills (Psal. lxx. 10.), the armies of creatures that move upon the face of the earth, the swarms of insects, and the seeds of plants, each of which infinitely exceeds all the works of art, and sufficiently proves the wisdom, and power, and goodness of God.

But were there no other creature than man, he would himself display a world of wonders, and effectually confute his own arguments, whilst he attempted to disown his Maker.

His eye contains almost as many beauties as it beholds: and the man that curiously examines its artful frame, may be tempted to dwell for ever upon it, and say, as the surprized disciple did, *It is good for me to be here.* (Luke, ix. 33.)

The tongue that too often blasphemes the name of God, does yet, in spite of the sinner, proclaim his glory; and those very talents that are abused to the denial of a God, do undeniably shew that there is one.

How much soever the pretended infidel may endeavour to deface his reason, yet it still will bear the image and superscription of God. And though degenerate man may sink himself into the depth of corruption, and become little more than dust and ashes, yet some sparks of the heavenly fire will remain within him, some tokens of the Deity will be left, in the ruins of human nature.

And the proofs of his being, which we find within and without us, which attend us, when we sit in the house, and when we walk by the way, when we lie down, and when rise up (Deut. vi. 7.), are abundantly confirmed by the united testimony of every age and nation.

Ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man upon the earth (Deut. iv. 32.), and they will tell you, there has been no part of time, without the knowledge of God. And ask from the one side of heaven to the other (Deut. v. 32.), and it will tell you, there has not been any nation or people intirely ignorant of him.

A faint

A faint and glimmering light discovered itself in the lands of darkness; and though the wretched inhabitants had almost forgotten that they were men, yet they had not utterly forgotten that there was a God.

And the wisest of the nations preserved the knowledge of his being, and valued it more than all the improvements of their reason. They were not so *wise in their own conceits* (Rom. xii. 16.), as our modern infidels, nor did they reject it, as a thing above their capacities, nor scoff at it, as a thing below them.

When the several countries were peopled, the knowledge of God spread itself over the world; and after the division of tongues, every speech and language ministered to the propagation of it.

And I may appeal even to the Atheist himself concerning the proofs of a Deity, as St. Paul did to Agrippa, concerning the prophets, *Believest thou these things? I know that thou believest.* (Acts, xxvi. 27.)

For though all other arguments should in vain demand his belief, though they press him in vain to hearken to them, yet his fears are still an unanswerable argument, and must and will be heard. They cry so loud, that they can never be silenced; they are so firmly rooted in his being, that they can never be removed.

His haughtiest laughter and derision, is but a fallacious shew to cover them; and his boasted objections are no more. While he endeavours to shake the faith of others, he cannot satisfy himself, but distrusts his own foundation, while he attempts to destroy the rock of ages.

If we follow him into his retirement, his fears are there; if we attend him into company, they are *there also*. Whilst he admires *the wine, when it giveth his colour in the cup, and moveth itself aright* (Prov. xxiii. 31.), a guilty terror seizes him, that *biteth like a serpent, and stings like an adder.* (Ver. 32.)

When he buoys up his spirits with forced and artificial mirth, *his countenance is suddenly changed, and his thoughts trouble him.* (Dan. v. 6.)

And when he is compelled to be alone, he is an odious companion to himself, and is self-condemned, though he will not own the conviction.

If we behold the pomp of a triumph, and see the greatest of infidels swelling with the spoils of conquest, and drawing princes and nobles in chains after him,

could we enter into the secrets of his heart, we should find dread and confusion there. There would need no slave to ride in the triumphant chariot, no miserable wretch to rebuke his pride. He is himself the slave, though he appears to be the happiest of men.

And while he almost imagines that he is a God, though he denies that there is one; his fears smite him, as *the angel of the Lord smote the blasphemous Herod* (Acts, xii. 23.); and his accursed soul speaks these *bitter things* against him; *hell from beneath is moved for thee, to meet thee at thy coming.* (Isai. xiv. 9.)

And the fears of men are just, since the very devils believe and tremble. When the Son of God appeared in the form of a servant, and the fashion of a man, with the infirmities of our flesh, and the wants of our nature, in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness, legions of evil spirits acknowledged him in that humble state, and were struck with dread and amazement at the sight of him.

In the synagogue there was a man which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, saying, Let us alone, what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee, who thou art, the holy one of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not. And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this? For with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out. (Luke, iv. 33, 34, 35, 36.)

And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he rebuking them, suffered them not to speak; for they knew that he was the Christ. (Luke, iv. 41.)

The last words of the expiring oracles which were actuated by devils, gave testimony to him; and when they were utterly silenced, their silence gave a more effectual testimony.

And those miserable spirits that are confined in the prisons of the damned, do undoubtedly believe that there is a God of infinite power, whose wrath will manifest itself in a devouring fire, and everlasting burnings. They already feel the red of his anger, living in continual misery, and expecting a continual increase of torment.

And knowing the certainty of it, they

show

shew their unrelenting hatred to men, by tempting them to the highest degrees of sin against God, and endeavouring to aggravate their guilt and their punishment.

They behold with a malicious pleasure the success of their execrable designs; and having sown the tares, they delight (if we may call it delight) in observing the mighty growth, and seeing our vices increase and multiply.

And this is the spring of all their endeavours, that they know there is certainly a God, whom they fear with the greatest terror, whom they hate with a perfect hatred, who is able to punish his enemies for ever and ever.

And indeed did not the profane themselves believe there was a God, their impious scoffing, and blasphemous wit, would lose its sting and sharpness. It would not please, were it not surprizing; and it would not surprize if it were not terrible; and they could not think there was a God.

Were the notion of his Being really contemptible, they could not assume so much to themselves for despising it: their extraordinary courage, and fancied greatness of soul, would shrink to nothing, did it consist only in ridiculing a thing of nought.

But to believe there is a God of infinite majesty, wonderful in his doings, and terrible in his judgments; and yet to revile him with a daring confidence, and render him the subject of their ludicrous mirth, and wanton raillery; to despise the multitude of the nations for adoring him, and expose the weakness and cowardice of a religious fear, and an holy reverence; this is the heroic bravery, the admired master-piece of this improved age.

Where then is the virtue of believing, if we only believe? The impious, the profane, the devils, and (I may also say) the atheists (whatsoever they pretend) do the same. We know that it is hardly possible to disbelieve that there is a God; what then can we claim for believing that there is one? When *everything in the heavens, in the earth, and under the earth*, is a proof of his being, to doubt of it, is no less foolish than impious. For to doubt without reason, is as palpable a token of folly, as to believe without rea-

son. And a groundless suspicion, though it may sometimes pass for wisdom, is a manifest sign of weakness. Because it is dangerous to build upon the sand, is it therefore dangerous to build upon a rock?

If we question the being of a God, we may as justly question whether we were born, because we know not all the circumstances of our birth, or cannot exactly tell how we grew in the womb.

Or we may as justly affirm, that we shall never die, *though thousands fall beside us, and ten thousands at our right hand* (Psal. xci. 7.), because we are ignorant of the manner of our dissolution, and cannot fully describe the divorce of the soul from the body.

This then is undoubtedly certain, that the existence of a God is so clearly attested, that we cannot but believe it, unless we renounce our reason.

But if we believe it just as we believe the histories of ancient times, or the descriptions of distant countries; if we think it concerns us no more than the ages that we can never recall, or the nations that we shall never behold; it would have been better for us, if we had never heard of the name of God, or were really atheists in opinion, as well as practice. For,

Secondly, It will serve only to aggravate our guilt, and sharpen our punishment. It is as necessary to *confess with our mouth*, as to *believe in our heart* (Rom. x. 9.), that there is a God. But this necessary profession of our religion will certainly condemn us, unless it is confirmed and enlivened by our practice. For it adds hypocrisy to sin; and the more we boast of our faith, so much the louder our sins will cry against us.

The speculative atheist (if there is any such person) hopes that there is no God, because he has affronted him. But the sinful believer continues to affront him, though he knows that there is one. The former will not acknowledge him to be his Lord; but the latter calls him Lord, and then disobeys him. The former acts without principles; the latter acts against them. And whilst one denies God's being, the other tramples upon his perfections.

We may behold a resemblance of the atheist in the obstinate Jews, when they spoke

spoke the words of ignorance and contempt; *As for this fellow we know not from whence he is.* (John, ix. 29.)

And we behold as lively a resemblance of the sinful believer in *the soldiers of the governor*, that *bowed the knee before Jesus*, and then *spit upon him*, and *smote him on the head.* (Matt. xxvii. 29, 30.) Though he pretends to receive him as his king, yet he pays his homage, by giving him *a crown of thorns*, and his specious declarations are no more than a solemn mockery.

If we lay his words and actions in the balance together, and allow them to be of equal weight, yet even upon this favourable allowance, his religion is reduced to nothing. For if his words acknowledge God, his actions absolutely deny him. But I fear that his actions will prove to be of greater weight than his words; and if those are sins, they will render these also sinful.

He declares that God is infinite in knowledge, in goodness, in justice, and in power. But yet he daily commits abomination in the sight of him, who discerns *the secrets of the heart*, and observes the rise, progress, and consummation of sin.

He *lives, moves, and has his being* (Acts, xvii. 28.) through the goodness of God, and (if you will believe his professions) he is sensible of it; but yet he delights to grieve his spirit, abuses the endearing instances of his loving kindness, and wearies his patience and forbearance.

He boasts of being the servant of a just, and righteous God; but yet he transgresses the eternal rules of his justice, and passes on from one degree of iniquity to another.

He knows that there is a great and terrible God, whose power is able to destroy him for ever and ever; and whose vengeance he can neither escape, nor resist; and yet he trifles with the Almighty, and *treasures up wrath against the day of wrath* (Rom. ii. 5.).

How vain and foolish is the man that imagines that the God of Wisdom will accept of his fruitless professions!

While he imagines this, he must also think, that his knowledge is blinder than the ignorance of men, his goodness a fond and foolish pity, his justice an irresolute weakness, and his power an insignificant terror, *bearing the sword in vain.*

Though he says of him, as *Elijah* in derision did of *Baal*, *He is a God*, yet certainly it is only in derision. And while his sins call for the vengeance of God, he must impiously conceive, that *either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked* (1 Kings, xviii. 27.).

His faith is so far from extenuating his guilt, that it renders it inexcusable. He *believes, as the devils do*, and he will also *tremble with them.*

The time will shortly come, when pains and diseases will take hold of him, and death will set all its terrors in array against him; then his sins will compass him about, and *make his bed uneasy in his sickness.* His false professions will reproach him, and his ineffectual belief will upbraid him.

His body will quake like the earth at the approaches of its dissolution, the rock of his heart will be rent, and the multitude of vices that were buried in forgetfulness, will *arise and come forth.*

But behold him in a yet more miserable state, when the trumpet calls to judgment, and he is constrained to leave the dark hiding-place of the grave!

He will see the Judge of all the world *sitting on his throne*, and *all the host of heaven* (Rev. xx. 11, 12.) attending upon him. *The books will be opened* in which his sins are recorded in everlasting characters, and the sentence ready to be passed.

The very heavens will be on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat (2 Pet. iii. 12.); and the general destruction will fill his soul with horror. The ministers of vengeance will stand prepared to seize their wretched prey, as soon as he receives his eternal doom.

How can he stand in that dreadful day? And whither can he fly? He needs no witness to accuse him, but himself; a righteous judge condemns him; and legions of evil spirits torment him. And now he *believes and trembles*, but in vain!

Let those consider this, who pretend to believe, and yet *forget God.* Let those especially consider it, who triumph in blaspheming the living God, and glory in profaning his holy name.

Let it be an admonition to these industrious agents of Satan, these inveterate enemies of God and goodness. They will find in *the day of the Lord*, (and may they

they not find too late) that their admired cavils and objections are *as stubble*, but the Gospel of Christ is sufficiently tried, and will endure for ever.

May they repent of their wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thoughts of their heart may be forgiven them. May they yet be sensible that they are in the gall of bitterness, and the bond of iniquity. (Acts, viii. 22, 23.)

And let us beseech the compassionate Jesus, by his agony and bloody sweat, by his crofs and passion, and by his precious death, to deliver us from all blindness and hardness of heart, from all false doctrine, heresy, and schism, and from all contempt of his word and commandment.

S E R M O N V.

The Hand-writing upon the Wall.

DAN. v. 27.

Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.

THIS was one dreadful part of the interpretation of the hand-writing upon the wall in the palace of Belshazzar, king of Babylon. At the sight of the hand which wrought upon the plaster of the wall, the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another (Ver. 5, 6.).

The king and his princes, his wives and his concubines were drinking in the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple which was at Jerusalem (Dan. v. 3.). They forgot to give praise and honour to him that liveth for ever and ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and whose kingdom is from generation to generation (Dan. iv. 34.): and instead of the king of heaven, all whose works are truth, and whose ways are judgment, and who is able to abase all those that walk in pride (ver. 37.), they praised the Gods of gold and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone (Dan. v. 4.).

In the midst of this luxury, this ingratitude, this idolatry, the same great and terrible God, that had driven Nebuchadnezzar from men, and forced him to eat grass with the ox, and afterwards restored him to his glory, and established him in his kingdom (Dan. iv. 32, 36.), was

pleased to rebuke the impious Belshazzar for neglecting the remarkable admonition and example that was set before him.

And in the same hour (Dan. v. 5.) in which he gave up himself to his sinful pleasures, and wantonly defied his bountiful benefactor, the hand-writing struck a damp upon all his enjoyments, and stirred up his thoughts to perplex and accuse him.

There was no one present that could read the writing, or shew the interpretation thereof (Dan. v. 8.); but his conscience told him, that it pointed to him, and chiefly concerned himself. And he was like a troubled sea till he sent for Daniel, in whom there was an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, to shew the interpretation. (Ver. 12.)

But the faithful Daniel could yield him no relief; he could only confirm and explain the unacceptable tidings, which his guilty conscience, and his ill-boding apprehension, brought him.

He constrained him to reflect, though the reflection was grievous to him, that when the heart of his father Nebuchadnezzar was lifted up, and his mind was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. And he was driven from the sons of men, and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and appointed over it whomsoever he would. And that he, his careless, and ungrateful son, had not humbled his heart, though he knew all this, and had not glorified the God, in whose hand his breath was, and whose were all his ways.

Therefore, says he, was the part of the hand sent from him; and this is the writing that was written. God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. Thou art weighed in the balances, and found wanting. Thy kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians (Dan. v. 20, &c.).

What a shocking consideration was this, that notwithstanding his greatness and power, he was found wanting; and that after he was stripped of all his pomp and state, he would have nothing to recommend him to a just and righteous God, but would be called to give an account of the impious abuse of his important

portant trust! This teaches us a very useful lesson; that there is a God that tries and searches the heart, and weighs all our actions in the balance of impartial justice; that *has no respect of persons*, and does not esteem us for the multitude of things that we possess, or the splendour of any thing that is great; but principally regards the use that we make of his bounty, and the degrees of our improvement in righteousness and virtue: and how much soever the glittering shew of riches and honour may engage the admiration of mankind, yet religion is of infinitely greater moment: without this, every thing that the world can bestow upon us, will not at all avail us: *for in the sight of God, the nations are as the drop of the bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance; and he taketh up the isles, as a very little thing* (Isa. xl. 15.); and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing without religion.

This should incline us to remember that we are but sinful dust and ashes, and whatsoever we are possessed of, will add nothing to us, unless we use it to the glory of God. We shall be *found wanting* even in the midst of those flattering objects, that gratify our pride, our avarice, our ambition. And when these are passed away, we shall become the most wretched, contemptible creatures, and be rejected by God, as the dregs and *off-scouring of all things*.

If, therefore, we have any regard to God's approbation, we must give religion the preference to every thing, since that alone will recommend us to his favour.

If we value even our present happiness, we must endeavour so to live, that it may not be lessened by the severe reflections of a guilty conscience.

And if we have any concern for our future welfare, we must make such a provision for ourselves, as will be our stay and support, when all earthly things are consumed. Let us therefore consider,

First, That we should employ the talents which God has given us, in his service, and to his honour.

Secondly, That unless we make this improvement of them, we cannot truly enjoy them in this world. And,

Thirdly, That the abuse of them will rise in judgment against us in the world which is to come. And,

First, We are to consider, that we should employ the talents which God has given us, in his service, and to his honour. The circumstances of Belshazzar were indeed almost peculiar to himself; and amidst all the portions of greatness which are allotted to the sons of men, there is hardly any that can equal that measure of riches, and height of glory, which he profanely abused to the dishonour of his Maker.

But yet the fall of this great man is an admonition to us, in every condition of life; and though our stations are widely different, yet his case, as well as *all other things that were written aforetime, was written for our learning* (Rom. xv. 4.).

The lowest and the meanest of us is possessed of some advantages, upon which he values himself; and did he value himself aright, he would endeavour to improve them to the glory of the author and giver of every gift, and to the happiness of his immortal soul. For it is not to be imagined, that the God of Wisdom should furnish him with a power of doing good, for no end or purpose; and shed his bounty upon his creatures, only that they might *take their pastime* in this world, and yield up themselves to trifling and vanity. Neither is it reasonable to suppose, that a creature which is formed for an endless duration, should regard no more than his present, transitory state, and look no farther than the immediate gratification of his idle, foolish, sinful inclinations.

We may be assured, that *the Lord that gave his servant five talents*, expected that he should *trade with the same, and make them other five talents*; and that he distributed to every man according to his several ability (Mat. xxv. 15.), with a design that he should answer his kindness with a suitable return.

And if the sense of what we possess, or the prospect of more, can encourage us to do our duty, certainly we shall strive to attain to God's future favour, by expressing our gratitude for his present blessings.

For what can be more desirable than that commendation, *Well done, thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord?* (Matt. xxv. 23.)

How wonderful is the goodness of God, that

that pours his gifts upon us, that we may qualify ourselves for larger measures of his bounty, by making a right use of them.

And how happy is the man that uses them as the means of *letting his light shine before men, and glorifying his Father which is in heaven!* (Mat. v. 16.)

With what satisfaction will he look back upon his past conduct, when he reaps an eternal inheritance from the prudent improvement of uncertain honours, and corruptible riches!

And how shall we ever sufficiently applaud his wisdom, who is rich in good works, and delights chiefly to abound in righteousness!

And I think it may not be improper for us to consider the several opportunities which mankind enjoy of rendering their present condition subservient to their future interest.

For every one has a proper sphere in which he is ordained to move, and in that he is capable of serving his Creator, of being beneficial to his brethren, and of promoting the welfare of his own soul.

Those in the highest ranks and fortunes have indeed the greatest power, and, like the heavenly bodies, may shed their kindly influences upon those beneath them.

But we that are far below, may yet answer the important purposes of an all-wise God; like the inferior works of the creation, none of which were made in vain.

And the capacities of the great are not unworthy our consideration, since they will raise a noble emulation in us, and excite our utmost endeavours to reach after them.

How large and pleasant a prospect is opened to the man, whom God has placed in an exalted station, and intrusted with a plentiful share of the blessings of this life: he is able to assert the cause of God, to promote religion in a corrupt and degenerate age, to recommend it to all his dependents, to invite them into *the path of the just by the shining light* (Prov. iv. 18.) of a good example, and to discountenance vice and profaneness by his authority. He can act in the stead of God, and be a father to the fatherless, and maintain the cause of the widow. He can raise a dejected spirit, support a sinking family, and come in to their relief in the critical juncture, and guard against their ap-

proaching calamity. And, in short, he can resemble God, in that beloved attribute, his goodness, and at once copy after the divine nature, and enjoy the sincerest pleasures of humanity: for he can gratify every noble desire, and answer the generous purposes of friendship.

The bare mention of his power, and of the several instances in which it can exert itself, is enough to transport every one that has any sense of gratitude to God, any regard to virtue, any value for that amiable quality which bears the delightful name of good-nature.

And I wish that all whom God has made the stewards of his bounty, would remember the end for which they received that important trust; and that instead of prostituting his gifts to sin and folly, and abusing them to their own and his dishonour, they would employ them in the service of God, and to the advantage of their country, their friends, and their immortal souls.

And we ought not to envy them those opportunities which they enjoy, and which we seem to want; for in the lower conditions of life, there are also means of doing good; and if we are disposed to do it, we may pass our time of sojourning here with comfort and satisfaction, and improve those talents that are delivered to us, to the honour of religion, and to the great ends of friendship and charity.

And even those that are engaged in the servile offices of life, and *go forth to their work and labour till the evening* (Psalm civ. 23.), may also dedicate themselves to the service of God, and promote their own interest, and the common welfare.

And the man that begs for the blessing of God upon all his undertakings, and resolves to do justice to every one, and to make an honest provision for his family, is an object worthy of admiration and esteem; for the holy angels behold him with pleasure, and God himself looks down upon him with approbation. He builds upon a rock, and that integrity which accompanies him through all his labours, is a strong cement to preserve his small portion of riches unshaken. He leaves a sure inheritance to his children's children; and provides one for himself, which no time can decay, *no moth nor rust can corrupt* (Mat. vi. 20.).

And when he comes before God, he will find that his honest principles will

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stand him in greater stead, than all the riches of this world could have done; and though he was not possessed of those things, which are now thought the marks of honour, yet he will be truly esteemed in the sight of God, and he will not be found wanting.

How happily are riches improved, when they are made instrumental to the business of religion, and borrow a new lustre from it, while they seem to give credit to it!

How commendable is the choice of the man, that chooses the one thing needful; and while he has every thing that is desirable in this life, possesses that also which will be eternally valuable in the other!

And how glorious also is the man, who, though he has no pomp or state to attract the eyes of the people, but is placed in the despised circumstances of poverty, is yet adorned with those excellent qualities, that will raise him to the highest honour, and give him a name above every name that the world can give!

Religion, therefore, is the principal thing, and this is the end we ought to aim at, in all conditions of life; for this will render us happy in the lowest state; and without this we cannot be happy in the highest.

And our present interest obliges us to dedicate the good things of this life to the service of religion; for,

Secondly, Unless we make this improvement of them, we cannot truly enjoy them in this world. Common experience teaches us, that there is no lasting pleasure or satisfaction to be found in those flattering objects that now surround us: after a little acquaintance with them, we begin to loath and despise them; and the continuance of those things which we at first admire, affords us nothing but weariness and vexation.

And if these enjoyments are but uncertain in their best estate, and quickly give way to disquiets and ungrateful reflections, how vain and deceitful are they, when the mind is oppressed with a load of guilt, and the thoughts of punishment are every moment striking a damp upon it; our mirth is then forced and unnatural, and our spirits are unable to keep up and support it.

And where can we find a wretch so desperate, as to drink to the full of pleasure, and have a true and lively relish of it,

when he knows that the most dreadful dangers hang over him, and hang, as it were, by a single hair; and that all his happiness is held by the weakest tenure, even by the blast of life, and is no more in his power than the shadow that departeth?

Surely he must tremble at the thoughts of the hand-writing upon the wall, and his heart cannot but tell him, that *for all these things* which he fondly doats upon, *God will bring him into judgment* (Eccles. xi. 9.).

How irksome must it be to consider, that his pleasures will shortly come to an end, and will be bitterness at the last; that the riches which he spends in a course of luxury, will aggravate his guilt, and must be one day certainly accounted for; and that his neglected soul will bring a heavy accusation against him, in the time of its distress, and draw his sinful body into a participation of its misery!

How deplorable is his condition, when all his enjoyments are short and transient, and the remembrance of them is disagreeable to him!

But, on the other side, how pleasant is it so to use our talents, as to be able to give a satisfactory account of them, and be assured that we have laid them out to the best advantage!

With what confidence may the rich man look up to God, when he knows that he has discharged his trust, and dispensed his bounty according to the will of his Lord and Master!

How does he delight to see the cause of religion prosper in his hand, to observe the happiness of those whom he has saved from perishing, to behold the young plants that he has brought up, *flourishing like a tree planted by the water-side* (Psalm i. 3.), and to find that all his kind and friendly designs answer his expectation!

His happiness is doubled by the delightful view of that of others; and when he thinks with himself, how widely he has spread the blessings of Heaven, and how many he has made partakers with him, his felicity is heightened at the sight of each of them, and his joys increase and multiply.

And when he permits himself to enjoy his innocent pleasures, and to use with cheerfulness those good things which God has provided for him; when he is raised to the highest degree of happiness that

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can be derived from any thing in this world; a surprizing satisfaction is darted in upon him, and his heart is filled with the thought, that he has something much greater prepared for him in another world, and an inheritance that will be securely his, when all earthly riches shall be no more.

And if there is any reason to fear the secret worm of a guilty conscience, that preys upon and destroys the fairest appearance of happiness; if we have any concern for our present comfort and welfare; we must so direct and govern all our actions, that no unwelcome reflection, no astonishing fear may break in upon us; but we may have a true sense of those pleasures that are now offered to us, and a certain prospect of those that are infinitely better.

And if they that live in the abundance of all things, stand in need of the comforts of religion, and cannot but be miserable without them; certainly they that have a smaller portion of the things of this world, are highly obliged, as they tender their own immediate interest, to make religion their choice; for this will sweeten their labours, divert their cares, and enable them to pass their painful life with cheerfulness.

And whensoever the hardships of their narrow circumstances tempt them to complain of their fortune, this will take them off from that ungrateful subject, and enliven them with a cheerful expectation of attaining to that glorious place, in which they will far, very far excel the highest pitch of worldly grandeur.

And therefore they should be always mindful of their eternal welfare, and not suffer their less important cares to incroach too much upon them.

Religion is indeed very often excluded by them; but the pretence for it will by no means excuse them; for *it is in vain for them to rise up early, to sit up late, and to eat the bread of sorrows*, if their better part is still neglected, and the soul has no share in the provision which they are making.

It must necessarily strike them with terror, to think, that while they are wearying themselves from day to day, their immortal interest is utterly forgotten; that they disquiet themselves in vain; and, after all they have done, they shall be found wanting.

And yet how many are there, that give up themselves to toil and labour for that which profiteth not, and refuse to set apart one day in seven, or one hour, for their duty to God, lest they should take too much from the time that is spent in a mercenary slavery.

They are ignorant and indifferent as to that which most concerns them; and for the sake of a temporary advantage, which will last but for a few years, or a few generations, they abandon and renounce that happiness which is to endure for ever.

Miserable men, that are regardless of their true interest, and of the end for which they were created!

Neither the cares nor the pleasures of this life should so engage our thoughts, as to lessen our concern for our future welfare. For our powers were given us, that we might work out our salvation; and unless we use them aright, the abuse of them will,

Thirdly, Rise in judgment against us, in the world which is to come. We are now in a state of probation, and God has bestowed his gifts upon us, that we may improve them to our eternal advantage. He watches over and observes us, and is pleased when we answer the gracious designs of his loving-kindness.

The same all-seeing eye that was witness to the luxury and profaneness of Belshazzar, and discerned the folly and baseness of his ungrateful heart, in the night of his feasting, is also present with us, and takes the strictest notice of all our actions: and the same terrible God that sent forth the fingers of a man's hand, to write an accusation against the king, and to record the sentence that was passed against him, does also write down all the circumstances of our life, and preserve them in everlasting characters. And in his book is contained the most exact account of all the gifts that we abuse, of all the hours that we spend in sin, and of all the admonitions of our conscience, which fails not to admonish us to make a better improvement of our time.

And though we now imagine that it is unworthy of our care, and wantonly throw away the blessings of God, as if *we were born at all adventure: and should be hereafter as though we had never been*; yet every idle thought, word, and action (Wisd. ii. 2.) will be brought to our remembrance,

brance, and every mispent hour will be charged upon us.

Come on (says the epicure), let us enjoy the good things that are present : let none of us go without his part of our voluptuousness : let us leave tokens of our joyfulness in every place : for this is our portion, and our lot is this (Ver. 6. 9.).

But this portion must be accounted for ; and the use of this lot will be mentioned to his condemnation in the great day of recompense.

He is willing to believe that *his name will be forgotten in time, and that no man will have his works in remembrance ; that his life will pass away as the trace of a cloud ; and be dispersed as a mist that is driven away with the beams of the sun, and overcome with the heat thereof (Ver. 4.).*

But there is a God that distinctly knows how every moment of his life is employed ; and will present before him a true and faithful catalogue of his sins ; for they are counted by him, *who knows the way where light dwelleth, and as for darkness, where is the place thereof ; who has entered into the treasures of the snow, and seen the treasures of the hail ; who numbers the clouds in wisdom, and the rain as it falls to the ground, and the drops of dew that refresh the earth (Job, xxxviii. 19. 22. 37.).*

Sinful man may indeed for a time put away the consideration of these things, and prevent reflection by a variety of pleasures. Nay, he may bid defiance to his reason, and sin on, in contempt of the ill-boding fears, the dreadful admonitions, the hand-writing that comes forth against him.

But though he refuses to read the writing, or to hear the interpretation thereof, yet it will at last be brought home to him ; and when his riches, his honours, and his pleasures, have forsaken him ; when he stands a poor wretched soul, before the judgment-seat of an angry God ; those actions which he never considered, will be weighed in the balances, and he will be found wanting.

The men that now swell with the spoils of nations, and ungratefully triumph in their undeserved greatness ; that despise the poor and fatherless, and rejoice in the multitude of riches, which they have gotten by falsehood and extortion, will be deprived of all their glory, and of that vain shew with which they endeavour to cover their guilty souls ; and when they appear

before a righteous God, they will be found lighter than vanity itself ; and their former grandeur will serve only to increase their damnation.

The wise and learned, that boast of their wonderful improvements, and, in the pride of their hearts, are forgetful of God, the fountain of wisdom ; will be charged with the grossest folly, because they have neglected religion, which is the only thing that is valuable in the sight of God.

And they that have entirely devoted themselves to this world, and suffered their cares and labours to ingross their time, and stifle the thoughts of God, will be forever rejected by him, and for ever lament that they made no provision for their souls.

There is no respect of persons with God (Rom. ii. 11.). The peasant will stand upon the same level with the prince ; and virtue and vice will be the only marks of distinction.

God has invited us all to partake of his happiness. *He has called the great and the mighty. But too many of them are ready to make excuse. He has also sent his servants into the streets and lanes of the city, to bring in the poor and the maimed, the halt and the blind (Luke, xiv. 18. 21.).* But they must qualify themselves for his favour ; for though he regards not those things which engage our admiration, yet he will cast them into utter darkness, if they have not on the wedding garment (Mat. xxii. 12, 13.).

Let us therefore put on the robe of righteousness, and endeavour to grow more and more into the likeness of God. For to resemble him is the highest honour, and his favour is preferable to the greatest riches.

Let us adorn our station with the beauty of holiness ; and let religion be our chief care, in whatsoever state the providence of God shall place us. If we should possess an abundance of earthly things, let us still remember that we have a better inheritance, an inheritance of infinitely greater value than all the treasures of the world. And if poverty should be thought most proper for us, let us still resolve to do our duty ; for this will support us in this uncertain life, and enable us to bear the want of those things, which God in his wisdom has denied us.

Let us study to attain to perfection

by the practice of virtue, which will be always of sufficient weight and value, and recommend us to men and angels, by its intrinsic worth and excellence; and to God, through the merits of our Redeemer.

The pleasures of life will pass away, and the time will come, when we shall not be capable of enjoying them. The glittering shew of honour will fade away *when the sun of righteousness appears* (Mal. iv. 2.). And our beloved riches *will melt like wax at the presence of the Lord*. But virtue will shine forth in its full strength, and receive the eternal approbation of God.

SERMON VI.

The Weakness and Uncertainty of Human Reason.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, at St. Mary's.]

DAN. iv. 31, 32.

While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O King Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken, the kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field.

LORD, what is man! How great and glorious in his first estate! How shameful and miserable, after his fall! Thou, O Lord, madest him but a little lower than the angels, and wert pleased to stamp the divine image upon him. Thou gavest him dominion over the works of thy hands, and didst put all things in subjection under his feet.

Yet this lord of the creation is forgetful of his natural perfection, and degrades himself from the high estate in which thou wert pleased to place him. He sullies the brightness of his reason, quenches that heavenly flame, and brings himself down to a level with the beasts that perish. And there is not a more remarkable instance of this fatal change, than that which the text has set before us.

Nebuchadnezzar was a king of kings; and the God of heaven had given him a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory (Dan. ii. 37.). Many nations were directed by his wisdom, and the people of distant countries waited with trembling for the laws that came from his mouth. His empire was of the widest extent, and it

was difficult even to number the provinces that were subject to him. His will was an effectual law; and as soon as *the herald cried out, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages; all the people, nations, and languages, fell down before the king*.

But though he was endued with reason to manage this weight of power, and to go in and out before this great people, yet he forgot the author and giver of his reason and power, and made himself the center and foundation of all his confidence.

But how vain was his confidence! how weak the foundation of it! *Verily every man living, at his best estate, is altogether vanity!*

While Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in his house, and flourishing in his palace, he saw a dream which made him afraid, and the thoughts upon his bed troubled him. He beheld the resemblance of himself in a tree, which grew, and was strong, whose leaves were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation (Dan. iv. 4, 5. 12. 21.).

And it was a just resemblance of him; for his greatness was grown and reached to heaven, and his dominion to the end of the earth (Ver. 22.).

But he also saw a holy one coming down from heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down, and destroy it (Ver. 23.).

This dreadful vision, and the interpretation of it, by the prophet Daniel, admonished him of his danger. But the admonition was given in vain. For at the end of twelve months, as he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon, he was swollen with pride, and wrapped up in admiration of the house of his kingdom, the might of his power, and the honour of his majesty (Ver. 29, 30.).

But in the midst of his boasting, there fell a voice from heaven that told him, the kingdom and his reason was departed from him (Ver. 31.).

Had he only lost his kingdom, though that, in the account of mistaken men, had been a loss greatly to be lamented, yet his reason might have supplied the want of it, and taught him to judge according to God's judgment, *who accounteth all the kingdoms of the world as a very little thing, and as the small dust of the balance*.

But not only to lose the character of a king, but also the distinguishing character of a man; to *be driven from men, and to have his dwelling with the beasts of the field* (Dan. iv. 32.), and be as void of understanding as they: surely this was the consummation of misery.

And if we rightly consider this wretched instance of human weakness, neither the splendor of any thing that is great, nor the conceit of any thing that is good in us, will any way withdraw our eyes from looking upon ourselves as sinful dust and ashes.

Our reason is a crown of glory, if we use it to the honour of God; but if we abuse this precious talent to his dishonour, it will only aggravate our misery and shame.

If it were lawful to be proud in any case, this distinguished faculty of man might seem to justify it. But even this is insufficient; and though it shine forth with the most lively piercing rays, though it make us like to the angels, though it be the image of God himself; yet we ought not to grow presumptuous upon it, for pride was not made for men.

I shall therefore take occasion from Nebuchadnezzar's fall, to shew the weakness and uncertainty of our reason, and possess you with an humble sense of it;

First, Because it is subject to natural decay;

Secondly, It is liable to be extinguished by sudden violence; and,

Thirdly, It is frequently impaired and lost by moral corruption. And,

First, Our reason is subject to natural decay. But before we consider it in its declining state, we may humble ourselves by looking back to its weakness and imperfection in our infancy, and observe the slowness of its growth, and the several degrees by which it advances towards maturity. The beginning and end of life conceal this glorious faculty; and it is lost in both, like a river whose source is under the earth, and which hastens to bury itself in the earth again.

In our infancy, it is covered with thick darkness, like the morning spread upon the mountains; in old age it is no more than the small remains of the day that is departed; and even in the noon of life, and the midst of our perfection, it is often clouded over, and intercepted from our view.

Behold the weak, helpless infant! and see what influence his weakness has upon his reason! He is incapable of discovering his wants, or making his satisfaction known. He is as much directed by the understanding of others, and stands as much in need of it, as if he were not endued with a rational soul; and hardly seems to enjoy the blind and uncertain guidance of natural instinct.

And when his organs are strengthened and gradually prepared for the use of his reason, how faint and feeble is the light that at first discovers itself! and how little can be discerned by the dawning of the understanding! It is unhappily governed by the senses that are inferior to it, and is filled with prejudice and error, by a false report and representation of things.

The faltering efforts of the babbling tongue betray our ignorance, and shew the vain and trifling notions that have stolen in upon us.

Even in the second stage of life, and the flower of our youth, though we do not altogether speak as a child, and think as a child, yet our reason is hurried away with impetuous violence, and derives its judgment from our irregular passions and partial affections. It deceives itself with false appearances of happiness, and tortures and disquiets the mind with extravagant hopes and expectations. Like the rising sun, it drives nothing but mists before it, and with difficulty attains to its full brightness.

But in the state of manhood, you will say, that our reason displays itself with an excellent glory, and bears a beautiful resemblance of the Fountain of Light.

Yet still it might be urged, that the thoughts of mortal men are miserable, and our devices are but uncertain. For the corruptible body prepresseth down the soul, and the earthly tabernacle weigheth down the mind that museth upon many things; and hardly do we guess aright at things that are upon earth, and with labour do we find the things that are before us.

But however we may, without indulging our vanity, or rather to rebuke and mortify it, we may allow that reason does, for a short time, exert itself with an active and lively force. It gathers the experience of former ages, and enlarges its prospect beyond the life of man, to many generations to come. It looks into the

secret

secrets of nature with a searching eye, and discovers many important truths, by its diligent inquiries, and curious observations. It furnishes the mind with a regular train of thoughts, and lays up the maxims of wisdom and policy, in the storehouse of the memory.

But, alas! it does not continue in one stay; but as soon as it is advanced to perfection, it declines apace, and falls away to imperfection again.

In our pursuit of knowledge, we seem to be rolling up a stone to the top of a mountain, which does not rest a moment there, but with haste and violence rolls down to the bottom.

Our sun does not stand still in the midst of heaven; but before we can entirely enjoy the delightful view, that we have gained by its ascent, it snatches us from it, by its sudden and precipitate descent.

Our largest thoughts are soon contracted, and the mind is lessened and confined to narrower notions and opinions.

The memory is too frail to retain the characters that were stamped upon it; and though they were deeply engraven as with a pen of iron, yet our heart becomes as the melting wax, and loses the impression.

Have we not known the most valuable treasures gathered together by long experience? and have we not concluded that they could never be wiped out of the book of remembrance? But how soon were they lost! *we went by, and lo, they were gone; we sought them, but their place could no where be found.*

The most artful contrivances, and the justest thoughts and conclusions, are broken and confounded by the infirmities of age. And those loose fragments that still continue, how valuable soever in themselves, are no more than the imperfect remains of distant antiquity; and they are often covered with dust, and it is hard to draw them out of the general ruin, and join them together.

And instead of the regular government of reason, there is little to be found but childish imaginations, or indolent dotage.

The preference, indeed, is frequently given to age, on the account of its wisdom and experience; but this is rather a sense of past follies, than a new supply of wisdom. And the aged having suffered shipwreck on the dangers of human life, are therefore most capable of directing the

unexperienced youth, to avoid the like miscarriages.

It is a melancholy truth, that our reason is affected with the corruptions of the body; and though widely different from it in its nature, is influenced by its several changes, and partakes of its improvement and decay.

And though in death it is divided from it, and breaks forth from its earthly prison, to ascend to God that gave it; yet during its continuance here, it is forced to be conformable to this wretched state, and to suffer or rejoice with the members of the body.

It sees but through a glass darkly; and the glass is sullied with every vapour, and brings a mist over the understanding.

Alas! who can bear this consideration? who can think of these things, and not be abashed and confounded? Is this our admired reason? Was this once a *pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty*? Was this once adorned with the brightness of the Everlasting? Was this the unspotted mirror, and the image of God's wisdom? How is it changed by our fall! how different is it from the reason of our first parent, that did not manifest itself by slow degrees, but shone forth at once a full and perfect day!

How long might this lamp of God have given light to us! even for ever and ever, like the seven lamps of fire that are burning day and night before the throne! But how soon is its oil spent! How soon is our vessel empty! The trembling flame hastens to depart from us, and is every moment fluttering and going away. So frail is our reason! So just an occasion does it afford for humility, if we consider it only as subject to natural decay! But how much more will it afford, if we consider it,

Secondly, As it is liable to be extinguished by sudden violence! And here I might observe, that every trifle in nature is capable of offering violence to it. And though it is placed on a throne, and intrusted with authority and power, yet it is easily moved from its place, and deposed by the tumultuous passions.

It cannot bear a surprize, or excess of joy, or an oppressive weight and continuance of sorrow: its edge is often taken away, by too close an attention to one thing; and it is as often distracted by troubling itself with many.

If it is not exercised and employed, it

sinks into a brutish stupidity, and is so far from bearing the likeness of God, that it hardly retains the appearance of a man: it buries itself in the heavy matter to which it is united, and seems to be falling into the dust, with its companion, the body.

And if it exercises itself too much, it spends and exhausts its strength: the variety of thoughts confound it, and the earnestness and intenseness of them, spins the thread too fine, and breaks the chain that held them together.

But passing over these dangers, we may proceed to consider the deplorable effects of violent diseases, and the ruin and havoc which they make in the understanding. When the animal spirits are raised into a ferment, and the wild imagination has cast off the government of reason, what confusion and disorder rises in the mind! A thousand false appearances impose upon it; and it deludes itself with the vainest thoughts, vainer than even the dreams of the night: wanders to and fro, without fixing upon any thing; and has not wisdom to discern either good or evil. The distracted man resembles him that was *possessed by an evil spirit; he oftentimes falleth into the fire, and oft into the water; he dwells in desolate places, and it is hard to bind him, even with chains; he is always crying, and cutting himself with stones.*

What a miserable creature is the man whose reason is either departed from him, or has not power enough to restrain his passion, or prevent the outrage that he offers to himself!

There cannot be a more mortifying spectacle to men: there can hardly be a more pleasing one to the enemy of mankind, than such a distracted creature, that preys upon himself, and is the object of his own remorseless cruelty, and brutish fury.

And the case of the idiot also bespeaks our deep concern and humility.

This unhappy case is not always owing to an original defect in nature, but frequently proceeds from a surprizing shock and alteration. And the man that was just now endued with reason, and a sufficient portion of understanding, is in an instant deprived of it, and loses all the notices and distinctions of things. His mind is as it were blotted out, or covered with a veil that cannot be taken off. And

he lives, moves, and has his being, without any sense or notion of it, and seems to continue in life, only to shew his weakness, and expose the multitude of his infirmities.

And the clearest understanding is liable to this universal failure, if the brain be bereaved of its usual supply of spirits, or oppressed with too quick a return of them, and too great a charge. The straining or slackening of the nerves disturbs the harmony of the thoughts, and a fatal bruise breaks the whole frame of the mind.

Dreadful also are the consequences of a palsy or apoplexy, which strikes with an unexpected force, and leaves only a languishing life, and a confused understanding.

One part of the body becomes a dead uncomfortable weight to the other; and while the withered members can scarcely bear each other's weakness, reason is also bereaved of its natural quickness, and forgets its past conceptions, losing the miserable remainder of life, in the sleep of a lingering death.

And these fatal strokes not only impair it, but frequently extinguish it at once.

Let us suppose a man to be in the most perfect state that ever was enjoyed in this world:

Let his reason have the most piercing sagacity in discerning, the most curious eye in observing, and the most faithful memory to retain its observations:

Let his judgment be enriched with all the wisdom of former ages, his knowledge extend to every art and science, and spread itself over them, as the waters cover the seas:

Let him understand the interests of courts, the state of nations, the conducting of armies:

Let him form the most complete body of laws, to govern future generations, and weave the closest schemes of policy, to establish the regular succession of princes:

Let his resolutions be steadfast, his purposes generous, and his soul as diffusive, as charity itself:

And, above all, let him be thoroughly acquainted with the fountains of wisdom, the holy Scriptures; let him understand their glorious truths, as far as they can be comprehended by human reason; and pay the most awful regard to those sub-

sublimar mysteries that pass man's understanding. Yet at the height of this perfection, if his blood should break through its appointed bounds, and that dreadful messenger of death, an apoplex should arrest him; his reason will go down in the midst of his course, and no more send forth its enlivening beams upon earth; his memory will lose all the stores that were distinctly ranged within it; his judgment will be spoiled of all its wisdom; his knowledge will be turned into darkness, his policy unravelled, his resolutions broken, his generous intentions disappointed, his precepts of morality erased, and his divine conceptions scattered away.

How terrible is this change! how amazing this devastation!

And though perhaps it is impossible to find the man that can entirely answer the character that we have drawn; yet we may remember (but we must remember it with the greatest regret) that a late fatal seizure bereaved the world of one (Dr. Smalridge) of the noblest capacities that ever was filled with divine and human learning.

And the church must for ever bewail the surprizing death of an excellent prelate, under whose shadow she thought herself safe at the close of the evening, though he was snatched from her at the opening of the morning.

But she must *weep for herself, not for him, for he is numbered among the saints, and shines like the stars in the firmament.*

It is indeed an afflicting consideration that reason is subject to natural decay, that it is also liable to be extinguished by sudden violence. But these are only to be lamented, as misfortunes incident to our nature.

But there is a more afflicting consideration arises from our faults. For,

Thirdly, It is frequently impaired and lost by ~~moral~~ corruption. Our reason, though of a purer substance and greater excellence than the body, is yet affected by its union with it, and disordered by the infirmities that attend it; and not only by its unavoidable infirmities, but by its chosen corruptions; and every vice weakens its power and sullies its light; and as the violence of the will, and the irregularity of the affections increases, the

authority of reason is lessened, and the force of its discernment gradually taken away.

The gratification of our lusts destroys its vital frame; gluttony stifles it; and drunkenness overpowers it, like a rapid stream that has broken down its proper bounds.

The fumes that rise from a loaded stomach darken the understanding; and excess in drinking disturbs the order of the thoughts, and fills the mind with absurd, incoherent trifles; and an habitual compliance with our sinful lusts, changes our justest conceptions of things into stupid dotage and forgetfulness.

Reason, when it is made subservient to vice, is condemned to Nebuchadnezzar's fate, *it is driven from men, and forced to dwell with the beasts.* And instead of ascending to the presence of God, it is held captive in the loathsome prisons of sin.

There is nothing that more effectually shews the weakness of reason, than its yielding to our vicious appetites, and stooping down to corruption.

And to convince us how little we should depend upon it, and how unsafe it is to lean to our own understanding, God is sometimes pleased to permit even the wisest of men, men that are endued with the greatest abilities, the sharpest wit, and the deepest learning; to depart from the dignity of their nature, and prostitute their glorious faculties to the service of the most shameful sins.

Hence they are often unequal to themselves in their conduct, and act inconsistently with their own judgment. Hence they are exposed to the scorn even of the weak and ignorant, and are made a rebuke to the foolish.

And better were it for them to live in Egyptian darkness, than to act in contempt of the plainest conviction, and offend their reason and conscience, which shed such an abundance of light upon them.

What a remarkable instance of human frailty was Solomon! *How wise was he in his youth, and as a flood filled with understanding! His soul covered the whole earth, and the largeness of his heart was even as the sand on the sea shore.* (Eccles. xlvii. 14, 15.) *He spake of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon, even to the hyssop*

hyssop that springeth out of the wall: He spake also of beasts and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. (1 Kings, iv. 33.)

And above all, he shewed the excellence of his understanding in choosing wisdom rather than riches and honour; and in adorning the temple of God with the most beautiful glory.

Yet this seemingly-perfect man was ensnared by the love of strange women, and turned away his heart from the Lord. With many fair speeches they caused him to yield; with the flattering of their lips they forced him to follow other gods.

And so miserably was he deluded, that he went after the goddesses of the Zidonians, the abomination of Moab, and even Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon.

And so far did he debase himself, as to fall down and worship every idol that the multitude of his wives and concubines set up.

So vain and weak a thing is human reason!

Having gone through the several particulars proposed, let me draw a few practical inferences from them. And,

First, Since our reason advances by a slow and difficult progress, and then hastens to decay; let us possess ourselves with an humble opinion of it, and never entertain haughty and presumptuous thoughts.

Let us look into the deep things of God, as the angels do, with a religious awe and reverence. And let us never be so vain and insolent as to reject those important truths that exceed the measure of our capacities, or to disbelieve every thing that we cannot entirely comprehend.

It was pride (as we may justly presume) that cast down Lucifer from heaven.

When Nebuchadnezzar's heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. (Dan. v. 20.)

And when Herod received the blasphemous applause of the people, and gave not God the glory, the angel of the Lord smote him, and he gave up the ghost. (Acts, xii. 23.)

And pride is the fountain of all those errors and heresies, that overspread the world with so mighty a deluge, that every good man cannot but tremble for the ark of God.

But if we consider the growth and

different measures of our own capacities, and the vastly greater difference of others, we shall see the folly of making our judgment the standard of truth, and disdain to receive any thing that is not exactly equal to it.

In our infancy we have no conception of many things that afterwards are easy and obvious to us. The first opening of the understanding shews us but a confused and doubtful prospect, and we resemble the blind man, who as soon as he was restored to sight, looked up and said, *I see men, as trees, walking.* (Mark, viii. 24.)

But when our understanding is enlarged, we attain to a plainer discernment, as he saw every man clearly (Vers. 25.), when he was blessed with a more perfect recovery.

The discoveries of latter ages have brought us to the knowledge of many arts and sciences that were hid from the former: and it cannot enter into the hearts of some to conceive, what others justly believe; and that which seems impossible to some men, is possible with others.

And therefore since limited creatures are not all confined to the same measure, but enlarge their knowledge to different degrees, certainly we should allow that the infinite wisdom of God does extend itself beyond the utmost compass of our thoughts.

Even our senses are capable of improvement, and may be enlivened with a quicker perception of their proper objects. And were God to give us a larger number of senses, we might be acquainted with a greater variety of objects, and behold a wider scene open before us.

And if this may not improperly be supposed of our senses, we may upon better grounds suppose, that God, in his due time, will exalt our reason to a more comprehensive view than it yet enjoys.

How foolish and slow of heart to believe, were the two disciples that went to Emmaus! (Luke, xxiv.) Though they conversed with their Saviour, and heard him expound the scriptures concerning himself, yet he seemed to be only a stranger in Israel.

Their hearts burned within them indeed, while he talked with them by the way; but till their eyes were opened, they knew him not.

And

And in like manner, we are for a long time held in ignorance of those things that are not difficult in themselves, and are written in so plain a character, that *be that runs may read them.*

And as in the progress of our reason, we obtain new measures of knowledge, so in its decay, our mind loses them again, and becomes as if it had never obtained them.

We should therefore bring every thought into subjection to God, and wait with patience and submission till that great and glorious day when our reason will shine forth, as at the first, and be raised to the immediate enjoyment of the fountain of light.

Secondly, Since it is liable to be extinguished by sudden violence, let us embrace the present opportunity, and exercise this distinguishing faculty while it is yet in its perfect brightness.

The accepted time, the day of salvation, is but of a short continuance, *and the night will quickly come, in which no man can work.* And before it is yet night, our lamp may be snatched away, *our candlestick be removed.* And if we survive our reason, we cannot live to answer the purposes of life; for we shall be incapable of performing a reasonable service.

And though it should not be totally extinguished, yet if it is much impaired, our virtue will be a very imperfect oblation; and the blind and maimed cannot be an acceptable sacrifice to God.

Let us therefore devote our reason to the author and giver of it, while it bears the liveliest resemblance of him that gave it.

Let us use it aright this very moment; and let not the day depart from us before we have done our duty, lest our sun should rise no more.

Thirdly and lastly, Since our reason is frequently impaired and lost by moral corruption, let us abstain from sin, that has so fatal an effect upon it, and never quench this heavenly flame by offering unnatural violence to it.

Let us employ it, as it ought to be employed, in meditating upon the law of God, and finding out the treasures of divine wisdom.

This will daily improve it, and give a larger compass to our thoughts and conceptions. Our capacities will extend themselves, and the purest pleasures will

flow into them, and yield us perfect satisfaction.

If we are enslaved by sin, we may indeed imagine, that the impairing our reason will give us peace and security. But it is a false and treacherous peace; and how much soever we weaken our reason, yet the dreadful day will come when it will recover its strength, and execute revenge upon us.

If we admire it only as the atheists do, and abuse it to the denial of God, we degrade our nature. For, according to the atheists' opinion, it is barely corruptible matter; it sprung from the womb of the earth, and all its admired thoughts perish in the grave.

But if we believe it to be the gift of God, and make a grateful use of it; though it is subject to natural decay; though it may be, for a time, extinguished by sudden violence; yet it will live hereafter, in a better state, where no decay, no violence, no corruption can come near to hurt it.

S E R M O N VII.

Fear and Disquiet the necessary Consequences of Sin.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, at Magdalene College, on St. John Baptist's Day, 1720.]

ISAIAH, lvii. 20, 21.

The wicked are like a troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.

THE God of Justice and Power has threatened to *rain storm and tempest upon the wicked: This shall be their portion in the other world.* (Psal. xi. 6.)

And there is nothing can give us so just a notion of their distractions, their anguish, their confusion, even in this life, as the comparison which the Holy Spirit of God has made in the words of the text.

When they are labouring under a sense of guilt, and an apprehension of punishment, their restless minds are wrought up into the highest ferment, torn with contrary passions, and tossed to and fro with fear and anxiety: and as the boiling waters *cast up mire and dirt from the bottom of the great*

great deep, so the raging waves of their troubled hearts, throw up all their filth and corruption from their secret hiding-places, and are perpetually foaming out their own shame. (Jude, 13.)

When their iniquity comes up before them, it covers them with the blackness of darkness. And when the light breaks in upon them, it affrights them, like the sudden flashes of lightning, which add horror to the night of storm and tempest.

This is actually their case, as we are assured by him who knows the secrets of the heart, and thoroughly discerns the passion, the shame, the fear, the melancholy and despair which torment a wounded spirit.

And as they do actually suffer this amazing punishment, so it is absolutely necessary that they should; for it is grounded upon the unchangeable nature of things, and the eternal difference between good and evil: and how much soever the masters in iniquity may boast of their imaginary strength; though they promise themselves liberty and peace, and in the pride of their hearts pretend to enjoy the greatest satisfaction; yet their hopes are vain, their promises deceitful; *For there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked. Their sins are spears and arrows, and they pierce them through like a sharp sword; and they know not which way to turn themselves, for they have no grounds to support their confidence.*

And we ought to adore the goodness of God for making their guilt so uneasy to them: for if we have any tenderness for ourselves, certainly this immediate punishment of sin must deter us from walking in the counsel of the ungodly: or if we are so foolish as to purchase this disquiet, by entering into the paths of wickedness; yet as soon as we have gotten this sad experience, one would think it should effectually discourage us from standing in the way of sinners, or sitting in the seat of the scornful. (Psal. i. 1.) That it may have this happy effect upon us, Let us,

First, Consider the dreadful condition of those men, who *are like a troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.* And,

Secondly, The causes of their disquiet, or why there can be no peace to the wicked.

And, first, We are to consider the dreadful condition of those men, who are

like a troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.

The great Creator of the world has placed every thing in a wonderful order; but he has shewn the exactest care in man, the chief of his earthly creatures. All his faculties are appointed to answer some important end, and are placed in a regular subordination to one another for the certain attainment of it. And whilst he obeys the Author of his being, and keeps the rank in which he was ordained to move, there is a most delightful harmony in his breast; his reason commanding him to do his duty; his affections quickening him in the performance of it; his will rejoicing to discharge it; and his conscience applauding him for it, and giving a pleasing foretaste of the favour and approbation of God.

But if he indulges his sinful appetites, his affections become unruly, and get the dominion over him; his will urges him on to his destruction at the command of every passion; his reason is forced to stoop to those actions which it loaths and abhors; and his conscience continually pursues him with the just complaints of the injuries which he has offered to it.

And the punishment which he inflicts upon himself is the more grievous, because *the arrow sticks fast in him*, and cleaves to his soul. There are many arguments to alleviate and take off the edge of worldly evils which can bring no relief under the torments of a guilty conscience. For those are sometime at a distance from us, and we may hope to escape, or partly divert them; or if they fall upon us, they may only affect the body, while the mind retires into itself and enjoys its proper happiness. But the sinner has no place to flee unto; no fence against himself. He is his own tormentor, and the sense of his sin and folly possesses all the retirements of his heart, and fills every faculty of his soul. *It is about his path, and about his bed, and follows him in all his ways.*

And that all-seeing God, who is present with us in every occurrence, and in every thought, will not suffer him to escape from his bosom-enemy, but constrains him to cry out in the bitterness of his anguish, *Whither shall I go from my wounded spirit? Whither shall I go from its presence? If I endeavour to climb up into heaven, it oppresses me with a weight that*

is intolerable: *If I go down to hell, there it will be a worm that will never die; a fire that never will be quenched: If I take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea, there I shall behold a resemblance of my condition; and when I hear the sea and the waves roaring, and see the hearts of men failing them for fear, I shall feel a greater disorder in my own breast, and be more violently shaken with the confusion of my own thoughts: If I say, peradventure the darkness shall cover me, the ungrateful light will shew my guilt, and display all my shame, with a bright and glaring evidence.*

It was this sense of guilt, this terrible conviction, that stung the accursed Cain, when he said unto the Lord, *my punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold (says he) thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth, and from thy face I shall be hid. And I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth.* (Gen. iv. 13, 14.) But his punishment was rendered more exquisite by a firm assurance, that though he wandered to and fro, he could not fly from himself, and wheresoever he was, he would still be found out by this his enemy. In the most distant countries he would be forced to hear the cries of his conscience; and every one whom he met would bring to his remembrance the murder of his brother.

The conscience of the wicked is always writing bitter things against them, and every accident renews the thoughts of their past iniquity, and takes off the veil of forgetfulness; and it appears in all its horror and deformity in the day of evil: when outward calamities straiten and besiege them, then they feel the most sharp and piercing agonies within; and when the world frowns upon them, they can have no comfort from themselves; no prospect of any thing but hell gaping before them.

How did the hearts of Joseph's brethren smite and reproach them when they were driven by famine into Egypt, whither they had sent their innocent brother, and when they were brought into a seeming necessity, either of snatching the comfort of Jacob's old age from his affectionate embraces, or of suffering bonds, imprisonment, and death! Then they were forced to acknowledge, that they were verily guilty concerning their brother;

and they could expect no relief, no compassion, *because they saw the anguish of his soul when he besought them, and they would not hear; and were their affliction the greatest that could be endured, yet they could not but allow of the equity of their punishment; therefore is this distress come upon us.* (Gen. xlii. 21.)

Guilt is naturally attended with fear and suspicion; and the soul that is polluted with it, is in perpetual dread of a watchful eye that looks down upon it, and an almighty hand that is ready to punish it. And the least appearance of danger sounds the alarm, and all its fins throng forth, as if they were awakened by the surprizing summons, *Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment.*

We have a very remarkable instance of this sudden apprehension, this surprizing fear in the licentious Herod. This great wicked man feared the impartial John the Baptist, because he was a just man and an holy. But he feared him much more, when he had sacrificed the preacher of righteousness to the imperious demands of the wanton Herodias, and rashly permitted her to execute revenge upon him. *When the fame of the blessed Jesus was spread abroad, for the mighty works that were done by him, and his disciples, king Herod heard of him, and he said, that John the Baptist was risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works did shew forth themselves in him.* (Mark, vi. 14.)

Others pleased themselves with uncertain conjectures concerning him, saying, *that it is Elias; or that it is a prophet, or as one of the prophets.* (Mark, vi. 15.) But Herod could not but make a conclusion, that filled him with horror. *It is John the Baptist whom I beheaded, he is risen from the dead.* (Vers. 16.)

Though he knew not of any resurrection, yet his guilt told him that he was actually risen; and he believed that he was come to proclaim his own innocence, and bring him to an account for his injustice and cruelty; and that *therefore mighty works did shew forth themselves in him* (Vers. 14.), to give testimony to the integrity of John, and discover the guilt of the murderer.

And we may suppose, that when *the veil of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks rent, and the graves were opened,*

opened, and many bodies of saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many (Mat. xxvii. 51, 52, 53.), then Herod feared greatly, and his heart was shaken and rent like the rocks, and the dark corners of it were opened, and all his sins came forth and appeared to him; and he could not but say of St. John, as the Centurion did of the crucified Jesus, *Certainly this was a righteous man!* (Luke, xxiii. 47.)

How was the perfect and upright Job affected with his sufferings, when God seemed to have forsaken him, and was pleased to try him in the furnace of affliction! *The arrows of the Almighty* (says he) *are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirits; the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me. Therefore I will not refrain my mouth, I will speak in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul* (Job, vi. 4.—vii. 11.).

And yet he had this to comfort him, that he suffered not for any iniquity in his hands, that his prayer was pure, that he could say with confidence, *Behold my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high* (Job, xvi. 17, 19.).

How much more then must the wicked endure, who are assured that they have provoked an Almighty enemy! *Their sins testify against them, their transgressions are with them, and as for their iniquities they know them.* They have sinned presumptuously, and forfeited the favour of God, and he has set them as a mark against him, so that they are a burden to themselves. (Job, vii. 20.). *When they lie down, they say, when shall we arise, and the night be gone? and they are full of tossings to and fro, to the dawning of the day* (Job, vii. 4.). *When they say, our bed shall comfort us, our couch shall ease our complaint, then they are scared with dreams, and terrified with visions* (Job, vii. 13, 14.).

Of this we have experience, whensoever we have done any sinful action. It troubles our thoughts, and interrupts our rest by night, with a confused consciousness of guilt, and a dreadful expectation of punishment: and before we are entirely awake in the morning, we find a clog upon our spirits; and though we cannot distinctly remember the occasion of it, our heart tells us there is a heavy charge against us, which strikes a damp

upon the enjoyments of the following day; and the upbraiding remembrance of it still returns, and as often as we look into our breasts, our shame rises before us.

A guilty conscience always casts up its loathsome burthen, like those burning mountains that throw up fire out of their bowels, or like the damned, *the smoke of whose torment ascendeth up for ever and ever* (Rev. xiv. 11.).

We see the consummation of misery in the treacherous Judas when he repented of his falsehood to his Lord, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, to the chief priests and elders, saying, *I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood* (Matt. xxvii. 9, 4.).

They treated him with the utmost contempt, and said, *What is that to us? see thou to that;* and he was also despised by himself, and became the object of his own hatred and indignation, so that his soul chose strangling and death rather than his life (Job, vii. 15.).

And into this restless state the sinner will certainly fall unless he makes haste to be reconciled to God. For all his arts will be ineffectual and unable to lull his conscience into a lasting security. The closest train of pleasures will have some interruption; the loudest noise of mirth will be silenced by the cries of guilt; and though he endeavour to strengthen himself in iniquity, yet the number of his sins will not render him altogether insensible of fear, they will only heap up wrath against the day of wrath, and the evils which he has multiplied against himself, will one day find him out.

When the hour of calamity or sickness comes upon him, the sins of his youth will rise in judgment against him, and the black catalogue of vices which he endeavoured to erase or conceal, will appear in plain and indelible characters: *when he casts up the account of his sins, he shall be seized with fear and trembling, and his own iniquities shall convince him to his face* (Wisd. iv. 20.): his conscience will constrain him to attend to her accusations, and will not permit *the temples of his head to take any rest* (Psalm. cxxxii. 4.); he has no hopes in this life, no prospect of happiness in the other. His present condition is too grievous to be born, and his expectation is full of misery. He has no stay or support, no anchor to hold him fast,

fast, but is driven about and tossed by the violence of a tempest which can never be stilled. He can never entertain the least thoughts of peace, but is at utter enmity with his reason, with his conscience, with his God.

And now what is the hope of the hypocrite though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul? Terrors take hold on him as waters, a tempest stealeth him away in the night. The east-wind carrieth him away, and he departeth; and, as a storm, burleth him out of his place. (Job, xxvii. 6, 20, 21, 22.). For God casts upon him, and will not spare, he would fain flee out of his hand; but there is no escaping, for horrible is the end of the unrighteous. (Wisd. iii. 19.) Which brings me to consider,

Secondly, The causes of their disquiet, or why there can be no peace to the wicked.

And the first and plainest cause of it, is a natural sense of the baseness and malignity of sin. We must necessarily trace it from this; for it could not so generally prevail, were it not essential to the nature of man, and were there not a real difference between good and evil.

In all nations and ages, fear and disquiet have been the inseparable companions of guilt, and no circumstances of life could be a sufficient guard against them. And God has made us liable to suffer the stings of conscience, that the wicked might not go unpunished in any state or condition; and though they should seem to prosper, yet they might have a secret worm to prey upon and consume all their enjoyments.

And this will always be the case as long as reason has any authority in the world. For the mind of man is endued with a power of distinguishing between good and evil; and it does not form uncertain, arbitrary notions of things, but judges by a standing rule, and cannot easily depart from its regular judgment. When virtue and vice present themselves before it, it presently perceives that the one is repugnant, and the other agreeable to it; and the more it meditates upon them, so much the more it confirms its first dislike, and ratifies its just approbation; and it is not in the power of fancy or inclination to reverse the sentence. For the nature of things is not subservient to a wanton humour, or to be bent and turned by our unreasonable desires.

Hence it is, that the sinner has such a

mighty contest with himself before he can break through the restraints that are laid upon him. He cannot but know that he is acting to the prejudice of his reason, his reputation, and his interest; and must endure many throes and agonies, give a terrible shock to his nature, and overturn its beautiful order, before he can descend to the commission of a sin.

And he cannot entirely conquer his reluctance; for when he complies with the flattering temptation, he blushes at the thoughts of it, and yields with trembling knees, and a misgiving heart.

And though he should imagine for a time that all is well, when the use of his reason is suspended, and his senses are wrapt up in the enjoyment of sinful pleasures, yet he cannot long enjoy the delusion. For nothing that is unnatural can be lasting; and, notwithstanding all his endeavours, he must return to himself.

And then with what disdain does he behold the loathsome object! With what reproaches does he accuse himself of folly! He discerns the baseness and deformity of sin; and can hardly bear to remember (and yet he must remember), that he is fallen from the dignity of a rational creature, and become more contemptible than the worm that crawleth upon the ground.

Though he labours often to reconcile himself to his great enemy, yet he cannot subdue his aversion, or prevail over his impartial thoughts; for they will sometimes exert themselves, and whensoever they do, his sin will be unable to stand the test of his serious consideration.

Reason will find some sober intervals in which it will call him to an account; some melancholy hours, in which it will reprove, upbraid, torment him.

The heathen had this sense of things to give testimony against their sinful actions; and as they concluded that virtue should be chosen, were it considered only as its own reward; so they were fully convinced that vice was to be avoided, were there no other consequence of it but its immediate punishment.

And their fabulous descriptions of a state of misery, and of whips, and scorpions, and furies, were derived from the real anguish which they felt within themselves, and from the severe lashes, the sharp stings, the restless indignation of their own minds.

And

And this judgment of sin has universally prevailed, and virtue recommended itself by its natural worth and excellence; and vice would have been condemned had there been no law to condemn it.

Another cause of the disquiet that attends a sinful state, is the expectation of a future judgment, which had taken root in the minds of men, even before God had declared unto us, that *he had appointed a day in which he would judge the world* (Acts, xvii. 31.), and the person that should administer justice in that solemn trial.

For the privilege of reason, which renders us far more excellent than the inferior ranks of creatures, does also render us capable of giving an account of our actions: and as it was natural to conclude that we were the work of an all-wise Being, so it was reasonable to expect that he should call us to answer for the discharge or abuse of our great trust.

And every man has in himself a lively emblem of the manner of proceeding in the future examination, and an earnest of the sentence that will be pronounced. For we find a tribunal erected in our hearts, and a judge sitting upon it, and summoning all our thoughts, words, and actions, to appear before it.

We are brought to this careful review, though our wills strive against it; and we cannot but judge of them according to their different nature and qualities, though we would fain confound the distinction, and call evil good, and good evil.

When we do well, our conscience tells us, that *we shall be accepted*. *When we do ill*, it fails not to assure us, that *sin lieth at the door*; and it whispers to us, that we should stand in awe of this bosom witness and judge, because *it bears not the sword in vain*; that it is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon them that do evil (Rom. xiii. 4.); and therefore it concerns us to pay a deference to it, because there is a higher court in which we must appear, a greater tribunal at which we must stand to give an account to a just and righteous God.

And this expectation of a judgment to come, has frequently checked the daring sinner, and interrupted his mirth and jollity; and whilst he has been walking in the ways of his heart, and in the sight of his eyes, he has been troubled with the ill-boding admonition, *Know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judg-*

ment (Eccles. xi. 9.). And the bare possibility of it is enough to confound and distract even those that will not believe any more.

Since, then, *the wicked are like a troubled sea, when it cannot rest*, and their disquiet is the necessary consequence of sin; let us consider the folly of embracing it for the sake of any temptation. The pleasures that attend it are imaginary and transient; *And it is even as when a hungry man dreameth, and behold he eateth, but he awaketh, and his soul is empty; or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and behold he drinketh, but he awaketh, and behold he is faint, and his soul has appetite.* (Isa. xxix. 8.) But the fear, the anxiety, the confusion, and remorse, that immediately follow it, are real and lasting.

Can there then be any advantage or pleasure in sin that will be a sufficient recompense for the loss of the peace of our minds? Can we be so foolish as to gratify our vicious appetites, when within a moment we shall be constrained to censure our past conduct, and reflect upon it with shame? Were we to gain the highest honours, or the greatest riches, yet they could not render us unmindful of our misery. All the arts of the flatterer, and the loudest applause of the multitude, cannot raise the spirits of the man that is condemned by himself. The weight of guilt oppresses him, and he is dejected and dismayed, because he cannot but be conscious of it.

And his own endeavours are as ineffectual to relieve him as those of others. For he sees through the mist which he would cast before his eyes, and loaths the absurdity of his own vain flattery.

Though he tries to hide his iniquity in the deepest secrecy, yet his troubled heart will cast up its mire and dirt.

Though he sometimes seems to be falling into a little slumber, yet it only serves to heighten his misery when he is surprised in it, and forced to awake: *For there is no peace (saith my God) to the wicked.* Let him make haste to escape, and fly whithersoever he will, yet the storm will reach him, and he cannot screen himself from its violence.

And at the last day, when the sea, and death and hell shall give up their dead (Rev. xx. 13.), then shall all his iniquity come forth, and the innumerable multitude of his sins shall accuse him before the dreadful tribunal.

And

And, after the terrible sentence is pronounced, he will be cast into a sea of fire, where his body will be tormented with the most exquisite pains, and his soul will eternally suffer the vengeance of an injured conscience, and an offended God.

S E R M O N VIII.

Pleasure and Peace the certain Consequences of Virtue.

PROV. iii. 17.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

WHEN God had given Solomon wisdom and understanding, exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea-shore (1 Kings, iv. 29.), he indulged himself in the enjoyment of every pleasure, and whatsoever his eyes desired, he kept not from them, that he might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life. (Eccles. ii. 3. 10.) And he that had opened the treasures of nature, that had made silver in Jerusalem of stones (2 Chron. ix. 27.), and was raised to the highest pitch of earthly glory and happiness; he was fully convinced, that religion was preferable to the most exquisite of sensual pleasures, to all the satisfaction that riches could bestow, and even to all the kingdoms of the world, decked with their ensnaring beauties, and set off with their brightest lustre.

He that was most capable of determining which is the true wisdom, has delivered this certain truth; *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy, is understanding* (Prov. i. 7. 10.). And as the result of all his experience, he says, *Happy is the man that understandeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandize of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right-hand, and in her left-hand, riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.* (Prov. iii. 13, 14, 15, 16, 17.)

And one would think there should need no farther inducement to the practice of

virtue; and that the singular pleasure that flows from it, would sufficiently enforce an exhortation to it.

That you may no longer be deceived by the artifices of the tempter, or discouraged by the ill report that he has made of religion, let me desire you to call to mind the sincere pleasure and satisfaction that you have enjoyed in the very instant that you have done any virtuous action; whilst I prove,

First, That the pleasures of religion are more noble, delightful, and lasting, than the pleasures of sin; and,

Secondly, That the practice of it keeps us in perpetual peace and safety, and supports us in the needful time, and *brings us peace at the last* (Psal. xxxvii. 38.).

And, first, that the pleasures of religion are more noble, delightful, and lasting, than the pleasures of sin. They are far more noble, as the soul, that is chiefly conversant in them, far excels the body; and, as the objects from whence they are derived, are superior to those that gratify our senses.

If we value ourselves upon the distinguishing privileges that are vouchsafed to us, and think it our glory, that we are above the beasts that perish, we must also conclude, that the happiness of the better part of our being, and the satisfaction that is agreeable to our reason, are much more desirable than those pleasures that we enjoy in common with the lower ranks of beings: for unless we measure the distance between us and them, by the different degrees of happiness for which we are qualified, our privileges are only vain and useless titles.

But I hope there is no one so immersed in sensuality, so forgetful of his soul, as to think it more pleasant to satisfy the meanest appetites of depraved nature, than to act conformably to reason, and consult the interest of his nobler part.

The objects that minister pleasure to us, while we do our duty, are such as the holy angels cannot but delight in, and such as even God himself looks down upon with approbation.

And it ought to be matter of our daily thanksgiving, that we are endued with capacities fit for such glorious pleasures, and have so many opportunities of making ourselves happy.

Whilst we are engaged in the pursuit after virtue, our minds are enlarged, and our reason is continually improved. The

image of God that is stamped upon us, becomes more plain and lively; and when we behold the increasing resemblance, it is an earnest of that inconceivable increase of bliss that will flow in upon us, when we shall see our Creator face to face, and have the honour of copying after him to all eternity.

Every good action encourages us to delight in ourselves and to look with boldness upon that object, which is highly pleasing, when we dare to be acquainted with it; but equally dreadful when sin has rendered our own reflections disagreeable to us, and alienated us from ourselves.

When our reason and conscience condemn us not, but anticipate the welcome sentence of our Judge, by giving us their applause, such beams of joy are darted into our hearts as can only proceed from him who is *the Fountain of everlasting Light*.

We then know that we are answering his important designs, doing as it becometh reasonable creatures, and have the concurrent testimony of all good men, and even of those unhappy souls that cannot be persuaded to taste the pleasures of virtue, and will one day wish in vain, that they had lived the life, or could *die the death of the righteous*.

When we are filled with a just sense of our obligations to God, and endeavouring to make a grateful acknowledgment, his goodness presents itself to us, in such an endearing manner, that it inflames us with fervent devotion, and is the very soul and enlivening principle of our obedience. We are then so far from thinking our duty too much for us, that we wish we could do infinitely more; that we had the swiftness of the morning light, since we cannot but *rejoice with the sun to run our course*.

How much more pleasant is this grateful sense of God's favour, than the impious satisfaction that degenerate men take in a prophane jest, and dishonouring the holy name of God!

When we have dealt fairly and impartially with our neighbour, and are assured that no one hath any cause to be our enemy, with what a cheerful confidence do we go forth into the world! Our way is plain and direct before us; we have but one design, which is to act honestly, and therefore it needs no arts to prevent discovery. We have not doubled and

prevaricated in our actions, and there is no unlucky turning, where we are liable to meet an adversary, no flaw in our behaviour that requires fresh pretences to conceal it.

When we have taken away the sting of an injury, by preserving the peace of our minds, and by returning good for evil, have made even malice itself relent, and blush at the enmity it bore to us, our mind rejoices in its noble conquest; and when we reflect upon the disorders of passion, and see the tempest quelled by the authority of reason, we cannot but compare our condition to that of the passenger, that has brought his treasures to the shores of safety, and looks back with comfort on the troubled sea. How far does this excel the imaginary pleasures of revenge, that rack and torture, while they transport us, and are no more to be desired than the dreams of a man heated with a fever, while his reason is overturned, and he is so far deluded by his wild imagination, as to think himself safe and happy!

Charity, as it is the most god-like virtue, so it is the most agreeable to the dictates of our nature, and has always recommended itself to us by the name of humanity. It is indeed a duty we owe to our neighbour, but it is at the same time a relief to ourselves: for self-love, that darling principle, is still importuning us to be kind to the miserable; and whilst the object of our charity begs us to give an alms, for the sake of God our common father, and in the name of Jesus our compassionate Redeemer, there is an advocate within us, pleading for him, and lest we should not regard the case of another person, it speaks to us in our own behalf, and intreats us to be merciful to our own bowels.

And when we readily stretch forth our hand to assist the poor and needy, the seasonable refreshment that they receive from us, returns into our bosom; their joy sparkles in our face, and our heart opens and expands itself, to make room for the full tide of pleasure that flows in upon it.

And now let the voluptuous man ransack all his stores; let him cover his table with an artful variety of studied meats, and indulge his appetite with every thing that his curious fancy can invent; and, to the height of all his luxury, he will not enjoy half the pleasure that arises from one kind and generous action: all his happiness

happiness will be flat and insipid, if compared with the transcendent delight that the good man has within himself, when he that was ready to perish with hunger tastes of the grateful morsel that he deals forth to him; and is, as it were, recovered to life, by drinking a wholesome draught to allay his burning thirst.

How wonderful is thy goodness, O God, that hast made one man as a ministering angel to another!

How shall we ever sufficiently praise thee, O blessed Jesus, for inculcating the duty of charity, and injoining it in a special manner as thy commandment, since it renders both the giver and receiver inexpressibly happy; and makes us like to thee in bliss, when we study to *be perfect, as thou art perfect!*

Every virtue contributes to the pleasantness of the ways of religion; and were we truly sensible of the delight that results from each part of our duty, it would almost commence that *exceeding great reward*, that is laid up for *the souls of just men made perfect.*

We cannot better describe the pleasures of a good conscience, than by repeating the promises that the wise man made to his son. *Keep sound wisdom and discretion: so shall they be life to thy soul, and grace to thy neck. Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble. When thou liest down thou shalt not be afraid; yea thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet* (Prov. iii. 21, 22, 23, 24.)

When the darkness of the night brings horror upon the wicked, the righteous *lay themselves down in peace, and take their rest*, knowing that *the Lord will make them to dwell in safety.* They are assured, that he will stretch out the wings of his watchful providence, to be their covering, and *give his angels charge over them*, those affectionate spirits that rejoice in their charge.

And when they awake in the morning, their innocence gives them a cheerful countenance, and they look lively, as the heavens, when the sun has withdrawn the veil that was spread over them, and brought fresh life to the whole creation: or rather, they are like those glorious beings, which they shall be hereafter, when the trumpet shall call them forth to a blessed resurrection, and the sons of God shall shout for gladness at the sight of everlasting day.

And the pleasures of virtue are more

delightful than the pleasures of sin, as they are pure and without alloy. The happiness that attends us in the performance of our duty, was designed for us, and suits with the capacities of our nature; it keeps the soul unspotted, and preserves the brightness of reason; and at the same time conduces to the welfare of the body, and the cheerfulness of the spirits; so that we neither offend our reason, nor offer any unnatural evidence to our senses, and fear neither the complaints of the one, nor the remonstrances of the other.

The delight that we take in it, is constant and regular, without any sudden damp, or ungrateful interruption. For the soul is as happy as it can be in this present state, and so far admits the body into a participation with it, as to shed gladness and health upon it.

But when we so far debase ourselves, as to pursue after the pleasures of sin, we can have but a partial and imperfect enjoyment: for our superior faculties are oppressed and trampled on, because they will not join in the pursuit; our soul is perpetually grieving for the injury that is done to it; and the noise of sinful mirth serves only to silence the cries of our wounded conscience, as the dreadful harmony of war seems to still the shrieks and groans of the dying multitude in the day of battle. And when the sinner has strengthened himself, and imagines that he has subdued his heart, and shall no longer be reproached by it, even then his hopes fail him, and he trembles at his own fears. The hand-writing is still too plain; and even when the madness of his chosen companions is sounding in his ears, he suspects that they will not be able to guard him against himself, and that after all his industry to prevent reflection, he shall yet be found out by this his enemy.

And he that over-reaches and defrauds his neighbour, though he may admire his little cunning, and think how artfully he has imposed upon him, though he may greedily embrace the unjust gain, and delight to grasp the treasures of wickedness; yet he must necessarily loath his baseness, and look with a shy and jealous countenance, upon the blot that cleaves to him.

But the pleasures of religion are not only sincere and unmixed, but they are also more lasting than the pleasures of sin.

When the good man is going to do

any virtuous action, his heart encourages him to it, and he is animated with such a delightful expectation, that he *panteth after it, as the hart panteth after the water-brooks*. And in the act itself, he does not find his hopes disappointed; but his highest conceptions fall infinitely short of it; the satisfaction that he derives from it, is greater than the fairest report had made it; for nothing but the enjoyment can give us a true sense of it, and after all the most engaging descriptions, the half of it is not told us.

And the pleasure is not transient; for a fund is laid in, to maintain a constant cheerfulness, and the remembrance of having done our duty, is a provision for a continual feast.

Reflection renews the agreeable impression; and the mind rejoices to look into itself, and behold the temple of the Holy Ghost, adorned with the beauty of holiness: and when it sees our conscience pure and undefiled, it speaks its admiration in the words of the Psalmist, *O how amiable is this thy dwelling, thou Lord of Hosts! Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are thy ways* (Psal. lxxxiv. 1. 5.).

And whilst we are under this pleasing conviction, surely, we must say, *One day in thy courts, O God, is better than a thousand* (Ver. 10.); or with the wise heathen, One day lived according to the precepts of virtue, is to be preferred before an immortality of sin.

The living waters that refresh us in the discharge of our duty, are kept in lasting cisterns, and they are never palled or polluted, but we have still a quicker relish of them, and they every day become more grateful to us, as we go on in the ways of religion. For the more we repeat its duties, so much the more they recommend themselves to us; and instead of growing unacceptable by repetition, they afford something new and surprising, and we like them better, as we are farther acquainted with them: for our faculties are improved by religion, instead of being impaired by frequent use. It is health to the soul, and as naturally conduces to its welfare, as exercise does to that of the body; and when our house of clay is hastening to its dissolution, the soul that has been habituated to virtue, is most active and vigorous; the virtues of a whole life then contribute to its reward,

and this lasting treasure is translated with it, into another state, and is its sure possession in a blessed immortality.

But it is not thus with the ways of sin. Whilst unhappy man is in expectation of its pleasures, his desires are like the unnatural thirst of a diseased body; his mind is in a ferment, and cannot be at rest, till he has attained to the beloved object; and when he has gained this his point, he finds that his hope, restless as it was, was better than the enjoyment: for the sake of this indeed he thought, that the hours came on with too slow a pace, and kept his happiness at a distance. But when the desired hour comes, the pleasure forsakes him, almost as soon as he embraces it; and the time of enjoyment is but as a point, if compared with that which he wished away.

Before he has swallowed the luscious draught, he begins to taste the gall and wormwood: and the treacherous serpent that invited him to drink of it, stings him to death, while he fondly plays and twits himself about him.

And then his memory is so far from renewing the pleasure, that it brings his sin under a quite different appearance, and shews him his reason and conscience wounded with poisonous arrows.

And be the pleasure he is inclined to, never so charming, yet it will not bear to be often repeated; he is soon convinced, that it cannot afford him variety of entertainment; and still meeting with but imperfect satisfaction, and with the same disappointments, he is weary of treading in the circle of sin; and though his lusts command him to go on, yet he sickens at the thoughts of it; and the sinful enjoyment weakens and overpowers his capacities, so that by often reaching after it, they destroy themselves.

How miserable then is the man that has rendered himself incapable of having a sense of those pleasures that he has chiefly sought after, and is so little acquainted with religion, that he cannot receive any relief from it!

How disagreeable a sight is he, when he retains the will, but not the power of sinning, and endeavours to recover his lost appetite, and quicken it, with the sharpest juices? But his stomach rejects the loathsome burthen, and though he would fain bear a part in company, and run into the same excess of riot with them, yet he is compelled

compelled to own, that he is not able to keep pace with them.

But supposing, that his sin is not too hard for him, till the flower of life is fading away; yet the time will come, when he will want a support; and if he makes this his staff to lean upon, it will pierce him through: for the pleasure that allured him to the commission of every act of sin, will then be passed away; and after he has seen, that all its enjoyments were but as a guest that tarrieth but a day, he will have all his sins heaping themselves upon him, to crush him, when he is already bowed down with infirmities: and each particular of his sad account, will appear with fresh characters in his mind, when all other impressions are worn away; and will encrease the dreadful retinue of the king of terrors.

That we may be inclined to make a better provision against the evil day, I shall,

Secondly, Shew that the practice of religion keeps us in perpetual peace and safety, and supports us in the needful time, and brings us peace at the last. Religion preserves a settled tranquillity in the mind, and prevents disquieting fears, and the tumults of unruly passion. And when all is well within, it assures us, that we are in peace and safety abroad; for it engages the kindness of Providence, and gains the good-will of men. The world approves the man whom God delights to honour; and if any one should be so unreasonable, as to retain a prejudice against him, he knows that God will turn his heart, and *make even his enemies to be at peace with him*. Having an undoubted certainty, that he has done no man wrong, he is confident that every one will think favourably of him; or if it should happen otherwise, that his cause is so good, that it will soon justify itself. Thus secure from danger, he enjoys the ordinary pleasures of life, and every little occurrence makes some addition to his happiness. When he is walking abroad, the multitude of objects that are displayed before him, put him in mind of his great Creator; and the wonderful works of the heavens and the earth transport him with pious exultation. When he is sitting by himself, he is not without a friend and counsellor, that entertains him with variety of pleasures, and renders the mirth of company superfluous to him: and when

he enters into conversation, he has every thing that is valuable in it; and religion sheds its delightful beams upon the innocent liberty that he allows himself: for religion, like the light of the sun, adds a new beauty to every object that it shines upon, and the satisfaction that arises from it, makes every thing that is pleasant more exceedingly pleasing: and if he has a fair portion of the things of this world allotted to him, he can use them with complacency, because the poor are partakers with him; and he is satisfied that he cannot accuse himself, either for acquiring them unjustly, or abusing of them to the hurt of his own soul.

It is indeed a very powerful inducement to the practice of religion, that it heightens every enjoyment, and improves our happiness in the days of our youth and prosperity. But the surest trial of its principles is in the hour of danger. Then we shall most especially perceive their never-failing support and effectual comforts. To have a citadel to retire to, where we shall be above the reach of an enemy, after he has done his utmost to straiten and distress us; this surely is an advantage to be sought for with the most ardent desires. And this is a case peculiar to religion. The rich man may fall from his most established greatness, or he may keep his possessions, and yet they will not be serviceable to him, when the most glittering shew will be too little to conceal a troubled mind; or when his pains will not be at all alleviated by the most expensive applications. But the sharpest misery that worldly evils can create, can never deprive us of the comforts of religion. Though the season is never so dark and gloomy, there will yet be light in the hearts of the righteous. Though every sinew is an instrument of torture, and diseases fill every vein, yet the mind can enjoy the peace of conscience, and collect all the most valuable satisfactions within itself.

When God is pleased to correct us, in his fatherly kindness, and the good things that he gave us are taken away, then we shall rejoice, that we held fast our integrity, and would not let it go: this will be as the angel from heaven, that stood by our Blessed Saviour, strengthening him in his agonies. And whatever interpretation the world may put upon our sufferings; how ready soever our pretended

friends may be, to upbraid us, in our misery, with their censorious reproofs; yet these arrows will be unable to hurt us, if our heart does not reproach us, and we are not afraid to commit our cause to God. Then we shall stand on a sure foundation, and regard not the proud waves that roll against us, since we have a treasure which we cannot be bereaved of; which would still be above the power of the waters, were God to permit them once more to break down their appointed bounds; and which will shine like the fine gold, when the world shall melt away in a devouring fire, and all its glories return to dross and corruption. It is religion that will stand us in great stead, when our senses will be no longer capable of pleasure, and even the desire of all their objects will fail: when our friends with ineffectual wailing shall complain, that all their endeavours are in vain, this will give us relief and consolation. When every hour casts an additional weight upon us, this will bring the days of our youth to remembrance, and set them against the days of darkness: when the body turns for rest, and cannot find it, the mind will enjoy it by reflection; and when the portion of our time is almost run out, and every drop seems to be the last, this will make the time past our own: when we are taking our farewell of the world, this will cleave fast to us, with a faithful assurance, that it will never fail nor forsake us. This will enable the soul and body to bear a short separation, since it fills us with a joyful hope that they will meet in glory; when our great enemy is trying his utmost efforts to discourage us into a surrender in our last hour, this will deliver us safe to a guard of angels; when our spirits are just sinking away, this will mingle its past pleasures and comforts, in one rich refreshing cordial; and when our eyes are almost covered with the night of death, our faith will look up to Heaven with the most piercing discernment, and our hope will grow into enjoyment.

O let us taste and see how good the Lord is, and we shall never repent of the experiment; but every branch of our duty will open new scenes of pleasure, and the increase of knowledge will enlarge our happiness. Every advance that we make will bring us nearer to the prospect of the promised land; and when we are on the brink of the grave, we shall stand on the

verge of a blessed eternity; and having viewed, through faith, the glorious mansions that are prepared for us, we shall contentedly lie down and die; for we cannot but be willing to depart into the regions of peace; and certainly we must desire to go hence, that *our eyes may see this salvation.*

Then we shall confess, that *the merchandize of wisdom is better than the merchandize of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold: that she is more precious than rubies, and all the things we could desire were not to be compared unto her. For she has ages of bliss in her right-hand, and in her left-hand never-fading riches and honour. Her ways are ways of inexpressible pleasantness, and all her paths lead to everlasting peace.*

SERMON IX.

The Duty and Advantage of Self-Examination.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, at St Mary's.]

I COR. xi. 28.

Let a man examine himself.

THE examination of ourselves is a duty most especially necessary, before we partake of the Lord's supper, as it qualifies us for the receiving of that inestimable blessing, and cleanses and prepares our hearts, that the Son of God may vouchsafe to be spiritually present with us. And it was enjoined by the apostle, with an immediate regard to that holy sacrament. *Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.*

But it is also a duty at all times necessary:

First, As it gives us a true sense of our condition.

Secondly, As it inclines us to be tender and favourable in our censures of others.

Thirdly, As it makes us cautious lest we offend.

Fourthly, As it takes us off from a vain confidence and presumption.

And, lastly, As it fills us with well-grounded peace and satisfaction, and enables us to go with a just assurance to a greater examination, at the awful tribunal of Almighty God.

And, first, self-examination will give us a true sense of our condition. The knowledge of ourselves is of the most immediate concernment to us, and of the greatest use and importance in the conduct of human life: and yet there is hardly any thing more neglected, and no neglect more strange and unaccountable than this: for the means of obtaining this knowledge are daily presented to us, and every time that we think, we have an opportunity of being acquainted with ourselves. This knowledge is not hidden from us, neither is it afar off. *It is not in heaven, that we should say, who shall go up for us to heaven and bring it to us? neither is it beyond the sea, that we should say, who shall go over the sea and fetch it to us?* But it is in our heart, and our bosom can disclose it. Yet foolish man chooses to be a stranger to himself, and desires to understand every thing but his own state and condition.

We seek out the things that are too hard for us, and search for things that are above our strength; we are curious in unnecessary matters, and regardless of that which is needful for us. Our restless mind travels over distant countries, and loses and perplexes itself, that it may acquire a vain shew of wisdom, but it seldom considers what we ought to learn, as we are men and christians. We are busy in inquiring after the customs and manners of different nations, or vainly endeavour to reform the disorders of our own: and we cannot be at leisure to look into our inward state, or manage that great affair upon which our present peace and our future happiness depends. We study to adapt ourselves to the prevailing fashions of a corrupt generation, and to attain to perfection in those things which are perpetually subject to change, and are to-day esteemed, and will to-morrow be derided.

Or, if we do not rest in those slight superficial ornaments, yet our time is spent only in the pursuit of more serious trifles, such as serve barely to amuse an impertinent humour, and please an idle curiosity. For we eagerly attempt to pry into those things, which God in his infinite wisdom has concealed from us, and impudently pretend to account for the wonderful works of God, and explain the manner of his operations, according to our foolish arbitrary opinions. And

instead of turning our thoughts upon ourselves, we are always labouring to divert them from their proper object, and to carry them to the farthest distance from us.

But we should not thus misapply them, were we not unmindful of our interest. The very heathen esteemed it a principal part of wisdom, for every man to know himself; and such was their value for it, that when one of their philosophers delivered this divine precept, they believed it to be sent down from heaven, and concluded that the Gods only could give it to men. And they justly set this value upon it; for our condition in this world absolutely requires the strictest care and examination: and we are exposed to the worst of dangers, by continuing in a chosen ignorance of ourselves; for we are compassed about with enemies that are endued with power to assault, and cunning to surprize us. We are placed in a deceitful world, that pleases while it betrays us. And our nature is weak and unguarded, and too readily hearkens to the flattering insinuations of the tempter; and lets in a multitude of evils upon us. Our affections dispose us to receive the most pernicious impressions, and our will bends and inclines us towards evil. It therefore highly concerns us to consider the tendency of our actions; in what part we are most likely to be prevailed upon, and what are the sins that most easily beset us. By observing our first approach towards a compliance with them, we may prevent our proceeding farther in the way to destruction; and by a seasonable care and caution may use such means as will most effectually secure us from it. Whereas, if we forbear to enquire into the posture of our affairs, we shall daily lose ground, and yet be insensible of our loss, and fall from one wickedness to another, till we are past recovery: and our case will resemble that of *Ephraim, when strangers had devoured his strength, and he knew it not, and grey hairs were here and there upon him, yet he knew it not.*

Even our best actions stand in need of a faithful examination, for we are liable to be deceived even in our admired perfections. A vicious principle too often lurks at the bottom, and taints and corrupts the whole. We think with pleasure of the service that we have performed to

God, or the charity we have shewn to men. But had we no selfish, mercenary view, no pride, nor ostentation? I fear these blemishes do frequently cleave to us, and after we have done our duty, if we would reflect aright upon the performance, even this reflection would dispose us to humility. St. Paul has taught us, that the most specious actions are as nothing, unless they proceed from virtuous principles. He gives the greatest commendation of that most excellent gift of charity, but he condemns the appearance of it, when there is no life or spirit to support it. *Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing* (1 Cor. xiii. 3.). So near may we seem to come to this glorious virtue, and yet fall short of it.

What a goodly show did the young man make in the gospel; when after our Saviour had repeated the commandments, he boldly answered, all these have I kept from my youth up? But he was told by truth itself, that he yet lacked one thing; and because he dealt not impartially with himself, that one thing was always wanting.

That we may not be thus mistaken, it behoves us to search and try our hearts, and bring all our actions to a daily examination.

To know God and ourselves, is the only means of attaining to a true sense of our condition. God has been pleased to reveal himself to us in a manner suitable to our capacities; and the more we meditate upon his perfections, so much the more we shall admire him, who is great, wonderful, and holy; and when we are filled with the thoughts of his divine majesty, we may look down upon ourselves, who are sinful dust and ashes. And as we, by turns, behold the beams of his glory, and the shameful tokens of our weakness and corruption, we shall continually raise our minds to nobler conceptions of God, and possess them with an humbler opinion of our frailties and infirmities. For, *The Lord is high above all the world, and his glory above the heavens. Who is like unto the Lord our God, that hath his dwelling so high, and yet humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and earth? As for us, He took us out of the dust, and lifted us out of the mire, that he might set us with princes, even with the princes of his people.* (Psal. cxiii. 5, 6, 7.)

As the examination of ourselves will give us a true sense of our condition; so,

Secondly, It will incline us to be tender and favourable in our censure of others.

If we are conscious of our own imperfections (and if we ever entertain one serious thought, we cannot but be conscious of them), we shall not hastily pronounce judgment upon those who are tempted as we are, and, with us, are too willing to comply with the temptation.

A frequent review of our case will shew us the many evils which our nature is too prone to commit. And if we have any concern for our miscarriages, we shall bewail the faults of others, instead of making them the subject of our mirth and censorious laughter. For it becomes us much rather to pity and excuse, than expose them to ridicule. And we shall not delight to reproach any man, that is so unhappy as to fall into sin, if we remember that we are all worthy of punishment. Were we accustomed to think of the greatness of our guilt, and to observe the still increasing measure of our iniquities, we should be moved with compassion, at the sight of those miserable wretches, that are bound in the same chains, and labour under the same accursed slavery. We should forbear to cast forth those severe reflections that cut them to the heart, and provoke them in their distress. *For a backbiting tongue hath disquieted many, and driven them from nation to nation: strong cities hath it pulled down, and overthrown the houses of great men. The stroke of the whip maketh marks in the flesh, but the stroke of the tongue breaketh the heart. Many have fallen by the edge of the sword, but not so many as have fallen by the tongue; we should therefore weigh our words in a balance, and make a door and bar for the mouth* (Eccles. xxviii.). And did we form a right judgment of our sinfulness, we should abstain from shooting forth the poisonous arrows of censure, and the bitter words of calumny, since our own heart would tell us, that they might with too much justice be retorted upon ourselves, and raise the same disorders in our breasts, which they cause in others. Our reason would accuse and reproach us, while we endeavour to fix a mark of infamy upon them, and calls us home to look after the interest of our souls, and correct the obstinacy of our depraved will, and check the violence of our unruly affections.

And if we once sincerely understand this necessary business, it will perpetually employ us, and afford us but little leisure to receive or spread abroad malicious reports. For the mind of man is a world of iniquity, a province large enough to engage all his labours, and confine him to himself. He need not extend his thoughts to foreign kingdoms, or take upon him the unwieldy weight of public affairs: nay, he need not officiously thrust himself into his neighbour's concerns, but may permit every one to stand or fall by the judgment of our common Master. For the difficulty of governing himself increases very fast upon him, and his accounts are swelling to so great a bulk, that they require a daily review. There is an innumerable company of sins that cleave to his thoughts, words, and actions; and it is a work that is more than sufficient for him, to remember the breaches of his past resolutions, to express his sorrow for his frequent failings, and to guard himself against the return of danger. And his charge would be heavy enough, were he only to perform the business of to-day, without having the offences of yesterday lying upon him, or waiting till to-morrow for an additional burthen. He may justly say, who can number the crimes which day by day I commit against God? *O how great is the sum of them! If I tell them, they are more in number than the sand; when I wake up, they are present with me, and when I lay myself down to rest, they appear before me. But he alone can distinctly remember them, who can number the sand of the sea, and the drops of rain, and the days of eternity; who can find out the height of heaven, and the breadth of the earth and the deep.*

Let it then suffice a man to examine himself, and let him leave the conduct of other men to be examined by that all-seeing Judge, who beholds all the actions of mankind, in one comprehensive view; even that all-wise and omniscient God, without whose knowledge *a hair of our head doth not fall to the ground.*

And if our sins against God will afford us matter enough for the most frequent and most careful examination; this examination will,

Thirdly, Make us cautious lest we offend.

For when we perceive how large our

account is, we shall be afraid to aggravate and enhance it; and since our guilt renders the sight of ourselves disagreeable to us, we shall endeavour to remove the accursed thing that troubles us. Man would often refrain from sin, had he a just reverence for himself, and did he remember that he is his own witness, accuser, and judge.

One might imagine that the thoughts of a general judgment should give an effectual check to our vices, and take away all the charms of a most agreeable temptation. But this powerful argument loses its force, because it is at a distance from us, and we are very willing to believe that it is much farther than it is. And the only way to give us a lively and prevailing sense of it, is to bring our actions before the tribunal of our conscience, and try them by our impartial reason. For we shall *stand in awe and sin not*, when we allow these superior faculties their due authority, and shall be ashamed to commit any thing contrary to their dictates, when we know it must soon be accounted for, and brought into judgment. And the sentence which we are constrained to pass upon our vices, will put us in mind of our final doom, and shew us the folly of doing those things to-day, for which we shall call ourselves fools for ever. No one would dare make himself his own enemy, were he fully assured that he should be found out by this his enemy; we cannot bear the upbraiding reflections of other men, and the fear of shame has a mighty influence over us. And were it our constant practice to reflect upon our past conduct, we should fear the reproaches of our thoughts as much as we do the censure of the world. And this would make us take heed to our ways; that our minds might be at peace, and we might boldly enter into the secret chambers of our breast, and delight to commune with ourselves. The vices that appeared against us at one examination, would discourage us from adding to them, lest another should present more odious objects to our view, and our troubled sea should still continue to cast up mire and dirt. We could not be so averse to peace, as to lay in more matter for repentance, and bring a heavier charge upon our souls. We could not be so unnatural as to wound our consciences, were we used to touch them to the quick, and probe the sore; and

and unless we are so imprudent as to suspend the examination, it will most assuredly force us to forsake our sins; for we forbear to come to the light, lest our deeds should be reprov'd; but if we bring them to it, it will necessarily kindle our hatred and abhorrence of them. And the discharge of this duty will,

Fourthly, Take us off from a vain confidence and presumption.

The state of a sinner is full of horror, and if we have any notion of guilt, or sense of misery, we cannot think or speak of it without trembling. But deluded man is willing to believe that all is well, though he stands in the midst of danger; and by neglecting to consider the nature and consequences of his actions, he lulls himself into a deceitful peace and treacherous security. And whilst he is *heaping up wrath against the day of wrath*, and enlarging the number of his transgressions, he fondly entertains a pleasing opinion of his case, and vainly imagines, that he needs no repentance. This fatal error confirms the conquests of the tempter, and is the most prevailing method by which he draws men into perdition. It is indeed beyond expression strange, that he should persuade us to descend to the commission of sin, when the curses of God are so plainly denounced against us, and hell is gaping before us. But though we are so wretchedly deceived, as to act against the dictates of reason, and in defiance of the most dreadful evils, yet when the strength of the temptation is abated, and we come to reflect in our cooler hours, we relent at the thoughts of our former madness, and wonder how we could choose destruction. It therefore requires all the artifices of Satan to render us insensible of our danger, and either forgetful that we have sinned, or regardless of the certain effects that will proceed from it. When he has mastered this difficulty, he makes us fond of the cords that he has cast about us, and averse to all attempts of breaking the snare, and returning to ourselves. Then we give up all our strength, like Sampson, to the bewitching Delilah, and are ignorant like him, when *he wist not that the Lord was departed from him*. (Judges, xvi.)

That this pernicious delusion may not pass upon us, we cannot use a more proper expedient than self-examination: for

if this duty is often repeated, it will keep up a fresh and constant sense of our guilt, and set our real condition before us. We shall behold our actions in a proper light, and have a perfect view of the circumstances that attend them. And when our vices appear in their natural deformity, we shall impatiently desire to put them away from us; or if we are so foolish as to retain them, we shall be full of anxious thoughts, and always mindful of our misery. And we cannot still be fond of it, and still pursue eternal destruction.

Did we fairly state our accounts, and observe how they rise every day, our subtle adversary could never persuade us that we are in perfect safety, or conceal from us the number and heinousness of our offences: for our experience would contradict his flattering insinuations, and when he cries, Peace, peace, our heart would answer to him, What have I to do with peace, while I am at enmity with my conscience, and my God?

Most of those unhappy souls, that are doomed to endless torments, do too late bewail the neglect of this important duty. They are fallen into the depth of misery, because they would not inquire whither they were going, nor open their eyes till they were in flames. They never considered their actions, till all consideration was in vain, and they were surprized into that most deplorable state, because they forbore to think what would be their portion.

Sinful man too plainly resembles the careless prodigal, that gratifies himself with the most profuse expences, and never examines whether his estate will bear them. But as long as his creditors answer his extravagant demands, and his artful flatterers minister to his luxury, he lives without thought or forecast; or if he thinks at all, he concludes that his fortune is too great to be impaired. In the mean time his debts insensibly increase, and prey upon and devour his substance; and yet he delights in his admired gaiety, and caresses every one that encourages him to follow his pleasures, until he is swallowed up in unexpected ruin, and it carries all before it, like a wide breaking in of waters.

Our future state depends entirely upon our present conduct, and if we miscarry

in this, we are undone for ever: this requires our constant observation, for there is the greatest danger in being deceived in this; and yet we easily suffer ourselves to be imposed upon by an unfaithful examination, and are too ready to receive it. But if we regard either happiness or misery, we must search the inmost retirements of our heart; and endeavour to recollect all the vices which we have suffered to pass without the deepest repentance. For though they were long since committed, and have been for a long time forgotten, yet they stand upon record against us, and will never be blotted out, until we have sincerely repented of them. We, alas, presume that our condition is safe, though the remains of guilt still cleave to us, and our former iniquities continue in their full force. And unless we bring them to a trial, while their horrid aggravations are yet in our minds, we gladly extenuate them, and put the most agreeable colours upon them; and we either deny that we have offended, or find a favourable excuse for every sin, and are inclined to say, Is it not a little one?

It is indeed an ungrateful work, to rake in the filth and secret naughtiness of our heart; and we choose much rather to rest in an opinion, that no examination is necessary. And if our wounds are slightly skinned over, and the loathsome objects are concealed from our view, we care not what evil lurks within, or how fast we turn to corruption.

But it is infinitely better, to make a perfect, though painful search, that we may know the causes of our disorder, and the root and foundation of it; than to please ourselves with a false appearance, while the covered evil spreads and insinuates itself into the vital parts.

After we have born the difficulties of our first inquiries, and been accustomed to examine ourselves, this duty will become easy to us, and give the mind firm confidence in itself.

For, lastly, It fills us with well-grounded peace and satisfaction, and enables us to go with a just assurance, to a greater examination at the awful tribunal of Almighty God.

This is a happiness which the wicked cannot attain to, and instead of it, they endeavour to compose themselves into a vain shew of peace; and are fond of

being betrayed into a pleasing error. But it is forced and unnatural, and no more to be desired, than the swelling of a diseased body, or the unwilling smiles of a man that is tortured with inexpressible pain: then only are we truly satisfied, when we faithfully observe the degrees of our progress, and at the close of the evening review the actions of the past day; and at the returning morning set forth with a clear and quiet breast, to run our appointed course. Then we plainly discern the nature of our condition, what temptations we have conquered, what we have yielded to, and what means are proper to prevent a second compliance. The scheme of our life is plain before us, and is regularly presented to us: whereas if we defer the necessary business of examination, our affairs will daily become more perplexing and intricate; and the reasons for delay will have a greater force upon us, and we shall be more afraid to state our case, and less able to unfold it. And the mind will labour under a confused consciousness of guilt, and be tormented with dreadful apprehensions of future misery. Thus the man of pleasure, that might have kept his fortune entire, if he had frequently looked back upon his expences, brings himself into perplexity and trouble, by a continued neglect, and careless conduct. He is unwilling to come to an account with himself, when he might easily clear and settle it; and puts it off from day to day, until he is entangled with an infinite variety of cares, and knows not where to begin, or how to carry himself through the puzzling examination. Though he suspects that his ruin is approaching, and is seized with ill-boding fears, yet he dares not inquire where the danger lies, or how he may guard against it. But the man that prudently adjusts all his expences, and keeps his accounts within a narrow compass, has the most perfect enjoyment of his fortune; for he exactly knows the measure of it, and cheerfully allows himself to make use of it, without any secret distrust or fear, that it will fall short of his expectations: an agreeable prospect is opened to him, and his affairs are drawn forth in an exact and beautiful order.

And in like manner, if we fairly consider our behaviour in the time past, and

lift and weigh our actions immediately after they are done, we shall have no clog or weight upon our breasts, but a well-grounded confidence that we know ourselves, and have performed our duty. And we shall think with cheerfulness of the time to come, being at leisure to spend it well, and discharge the business of every hour, as it passes along. That, and that only, will be our care, when the actions of our youth are justly stated, and our accounts prepared for the great examination. Then we shall reflect with pleasure, and be satisfied with them, as the Creator was with all his works: then we shall rejoice to be familiar with our minds, for they will be a continual spring and fountain of joy; and then we shall acquaint ourselves with God, and be at peace. The faithful management of our stewardship will encourage us to wish for the coming of our Lord; and we shall long to deliver up the talents that we have rightly improved. The thoughts of death will lose all their terror; since it will not prevent our expectation, or surprize us *in an hour when we look not for it*. We shall retire to our beds at night, as if the business of life were entirely finished, and we were then going to our grave; and we shall rise in the morning, as if we heard the mighty summons, *Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment*. And when the powerful voice commands us to go forth, and the sound of the trumpet reaches to the ends of the world, we shall lift up ourselves with a joyful hope, and stand undaunted in that dreadful day, *when the sun shall become black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon shall become as blood; when the stars of heaven shall fall to the earth, even as a fig-tree casteth her untimely figs when she is shaken of a mighty wind, when the heavens shall depart as the scroll when it is rolled together, and every mountain and island shall be moved out of their places; when the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, shall endeavour to hide themselves in the dens and the rocks of the mountains; and when even the mountains and the rocks shall melt away, then shall we behold, with unspeakable joy, Him that sits on the throne, from whose face the earth and the heavens shall fly away*.

And when the books are opened, we shall call to mind our past examination

of ourselves, and see those actions written in the book of life, which were before approved by our conscience. And the impartial testimony, which it gave to us, will be ratified by the voice of our Judge, with *Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord*.

Let us then examine ourselves every day, and let no business or pleasure divert us from this necessary work.

Let us abstain from evil, because it will not bear to be examined when we have done it; and let us do the thing that is good, that we may delight to come to a frequent examination.

Let us pass sentence upon ourselves, with as much justice and equity as if the whole world were present at the trial; and let us take care to deserve such a sentence, as will be confirmed by Almighty God, to our eternal and inconceivable happiness.

Let us steadfastly resolve to do our duty, and carefully examine whether we have kept our resolution.

Thus we shall always *stand with our loins girded about, and our lamps burning. Thus we shall always expect, and always prepare, to meet the bridegroom. And blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing*.

S E R M O N X.

The Effect of Righteousness, Quietness, and Assurance for ever.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, at St. Mary's.]

PSALM CXIX. 6.

Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.

IT highly concerns us so to behave ourselves in every circumstance of life, that we may enjoy the good-will of men, the approbation of our conscience, and the favour of God. This is the most perfect happiness that we can attain to in this present state; for it gives us the liveliest relish of the blessings of this world, and takes off the edge of all the calamities that can befall us.

How great is our pleasure, when we know that the best part of mankind look with complacency upon our welfare; when our conscience heightens our prosperity

perity, with those delightful reflections which are a continual feast, and when our gracious God sheds the light of his countenance upon us!

And how little shall we regard any temporal evils, when we are assured that no one has any cause to be our enemy; when our hearts tell us that we do not suffer for any iniquity in our hands; and when we can boldly say, *Our witness is in heaven, and our record on high!* (Job, xvi. 17-19.)

It was a just sense of this happiness, and of the means that conduced to it, which strengthened the resolution of Job: *Till I die, I will not remove my integrity from me; my righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.* (Job, xxvii. 5, 6.)

It was the constant performance of his duty, that emboldened the good Hezekiah to make his appeal to God, when sickness pressed him sore. *Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight.* (2 Kings, xx. 3.)

And for the sake of this satisfaction, the holy Psalmist breathed forth the most fervent desires of performing the service of God. *O that my ways were directed that I might keep thy statutes! Then* (says he) *shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.* (Psalm cxix. 5, 6.) That is, "If I make the law of God the measure of all my actions, and observe that perfect rule in all the occurrences of life, I shall look with cheerfulness upon the world, and neither be afraid to inquire into the state of my soul, nor ashamed to appear before a just and righteous God. My integrity will support me with that sure and well-grounded confidence which will not suffer me to be dismayed in the time of tribulation, in the hour of death, or in the day of judgment."

And if we put iniquity far away, and let no wickedness dwell in our tabernacles, then shall we lift up our face without spot; yea, we shall be steadfast, and shall not fear. And our age shall be clearer than the noon-day, we shall shine forth, we shall be as the morning. And we shall be secure, because there is hope, and take our rest in safety. And we shall lie down, and none shall make us afraid. (Job, xiv.)

I shall therefore consider the advantages that we shall receive, from a regular, uniform obedience to God's commandments:

First, As it gives us peace of mind.

Secondly, As it encourages us to look cheerfully upon the world.

And, thirdly, As it fills us with a lively hope and confidence in God.

And, first, As it gives us peace of mind. That we may enjoy satisfaction from ourselves, we must endeavour to discharge our whole duty. It is indeed impossible for us to come up to the perfection of God's commandments, while we are compassed about with infirmities, and God, in his infinite mercy, is pleased to consider our weakness, and require only our sincere endeavours to serve him. But if we would reap any comfort or pleasure from the discharge of our duty, we must not be wanting in those measures of obedience, which the divine goodness condescends to accept.

For if we do our work by halves, and suffer ourselves to remain in any wilful sins, hoping to make amends for it, by performing several branches of our duty, we shall be fatally deceived, for our vices will rise in judgment against us, and imbibit all the satisfaction that arises from the occasional practice of virtue. *We cannot serve two masters*, for our good actions will reproach us for the contrary qualities which yet remain in us; and our sins will strike a damp upon the pleasures that flow from our partial and imperfect regard to religion.

But then, says the Psalmist, *shall I not be ashamed when I have respect unto all thy commandments.* This is the only way to enjoy entire satisfaction. The sinner hopes to obtain his beloved peace and security by renouncing religion, and becoming completely wicked and thorough-paced in iniquity. But still his thoughts will reprove and upbraid him.

But the truly wise man resolves with holy David, to live in such an exact conformity to the will of God, that no spot may cleave to his hands, no dregs of vice may lessen his happiness.

And the man that makes this his care, is in the first place approved by his bosom witness, and satisfied from himself. (Prov. xiv. 14.) This is the immediate reward of virtue; and God has wisely ordered it, that as soon as we have done well, we should

should be encouraged to continue in well-doing, by the approbation of right reason; and whensoever we sin against him, we should also offend ourselves, and be condemned by our own impartial sentence.

The man that is true to himself and his God, possesses that peace of mind which is out of the reach of the changes and chances of this mortal life. He looks into his breast, and sees that all is well, and rejoices to bring his actions to a faithful examination, and even to offer himself to a daily trial at the tribunal of his conscience.

And it tells him, that he has acted suitably to the rank in which his Maker has placed him, and to the relation which he bears to a just and holy God. It assures him, that he has done those actions which he will delight to repeat, which he will reflect upon with pleasure in the evil day, which will stand him in great stead, when the world itself shall be no more.

Being satisfied that his heart has nothing to lay to his charge, he dares to be familiar with himself, and wants not those arts of diversion, those trains of pleasure, nor that hurry of business which the sinner is forced to have recourse to, but in vain.

The happiness of the righteous man is very great, because *his heart condemns him not*; but much greater, because *it gives him confidence towards God, who is greater than his heart, and knoweth all things* (1 John, iii. 20, 21.).

Whilst he is diligent in the business of religion, he maintains *the glorious liberty of the sons of God*; and that service, which is perfect freedom, fills him with noble thoughts, and decks him with a cheerful countenance, has some resemblance of his future state, in which he will be like the angels of God; whose employment is worthy of such exalted spirits, who have the honour to worship and adore the Lord of glory for ever and ever.

But, on the other hand, the sinner is abashed and ashamed, because he is in a state of slavery; it gives him a mean abject spirit, and makes him look down upon himself with *confusion of face*. He is at the disposal of every lust and passion; and one faith unto him, *go, and he goeth*; another *come, and he cometh*; and a third, *do this, and he doth it*. And he cannot but be sensible, that he is stooping to those actions that are very unbecoming, and tend to his dishonour. And while he

loaths his own behaviour, and performs his slavish task with shame and reluctance, he knows that he has brought himself into this servile condition, and sold the glorious privileges of his nature for a thing of nought.

Our reason, for which we set so high a value upon ourselves, is the instrument either of the greatest happiness, or the sharpest misery. If we are regardless of this faithful witness, and do those things that are contrary to its kind admonitions, it will not fail to pursue us with severe complaints, to upbraid us with our guilt, and display our shame. And the man that has acted against the dictates of reason, and fallen beneath himself, cannot be ignorant of his baseness. He sees his own deformity, and has a bitter foretaste of that portion of contempt that will be poured upon him, when he shall stand exposed upon the theatre of the world, and appear in all his guilt, before the assembly of the saints.

But if we choose reason for our guide, and bring our actions to be tried by its impartial judgment, and by the will of God; it will often present to our view the beautiful uniformity of our life, and delight to pronounce its just approbation.

How shall we be pleased with the survey, and rejoice to behold our past conduct ratified and confirmed by its authority! and how carefully should we stand in awe of it! How much does it concern us to preserve a constant sense of the dignity of our nature! for if we maintain a true value for those faculties with which God has endued us, we shall not descend to any sinful action; we shall not have any reason to be ashamed.

Having taken care to live at peace with ourselves, and to be approved by our own minds, by having respect unto all God's commandments, our obedience to them will,

Secondly, encourage us to look cheerfully upon the world. For the causes of that fear, that jealousy, that suspicion, and those surprizing apprehensions with which we at any time meet our neighbour, are deeply rooted in our breasts; and they are derived from our sins, those never-failing sources of evil. Our conscience, which is to us as a thousand witnesses, makes us as uneasy, as fearful of discovery, as if a thousand had really observed our actions: and when we are found out by this our enemy, we cannot but imagine

imagine that every one has found us out. But the good man has no watchful eye to dread, no secret shame. As he knows the integrity of his heart, so he wishes that all men could look into the depth of it, and search its inmost retirements.

Having no design but to satisfy his conscience, to do justice to his brother, and to please his God, he wishes that *his actions were as clear as the light, and his dealings as the noon-day*: for he wants no pretences, no private reserves.

And he takes the easiest, the safest, and the most satisfactory course of life. His way is plain before him, and he needs not trouble himself with any inquiry but this, Whether the action that he is going to commit is consistent with his duty to God? *For the integrity of the upright shall guide him, and the righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way* (Prov. xi. 3. 5.). He is never at a loss, never confounded by the various accidents of life. For he acts upon those principles that are unalterably good, and extort the veneration even of the worst of men. It being his steadfast purpose to *keep innocency, and do the thing that is right* (Psal. xxxvii. 38.), he knows that the reason of every man, if it is suffered to judge freely, will concur with his own, in giving testimony in his behalf; and therefore he goes forth into the world, with an undaunted cheerfulness, and a lively expectation of meeting with a fair reception, and universal benevolence. He is not alarmed at the sight of any one, for he has done no wrong, he has no accursed thing to trouble him.

And if the tongue of censure should endeavour to fix its calumnies upon him, and shoot forth its poisonous arrows, even bitter words, they cannot disturb the harmony of his thoughts, or make any impression upon him. He is safe in his integrity, and beats off their furious onsets with a fixed and unmoveable resolution.

Because he cannot accuse himself, he is proof against any accusations; and they can no more affect him, than *the arrows of the mighty can the Leviathan; the stakes of whose flesh are joined together; they are firm in themselves; they cannot be moved. Darts are counted as stubble, he laugheth at the shaking of the spear* (Job, xli. 23. 29.).

What a glorious spectacle was Samuel, when he durst summon all Israel together to acknowledge his fidelity! He looked with unspeakable pleasure upon the whole

train of his actions, and said unto them, *I am old and grey-headed, and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day. Behold, here I am, witness against me, before the Lord, and before his anointed: Whose ox have I taken? Or whose ass have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you* (1 Sam. xii. 1, 2, 3.).

He appealed to a vast and innumerable multitude of people, and bid a public defiance to hatred, malice, and envy. But they could find no objection against him. And they said, *Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand. And he said unto them, The Lord is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found ought in my hands. And they answered, Yea, his conscience returned answer to him, he is witness* (Ver. 4, 5.).

The man that can thus look the world in the face, *shall never be moved. He will not be afraid of evil tidings, for his heart standeth fast, and believeth in the Lord. His heart is stablished, and will not shrink; and if he can have any enemies, he shall not be ashamed when he speaketh with them.* (Psal. cxii. 7, 8.—cxxxvii. 6.)

With what boldness did the perfect and upright Job defend himself against the reproaches of his pretended friends, because he was assured that they had nothing to urge against him! O (says he) *that I knew where I might find God, that I might come even unto his seat; I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments!* He desired to be weighed in an even balance, that God might know his integrity; because he had not covered his transgressions, as Adam, by biding his iniquity in his bosom (Job, xxxiii. 3, 4.—xxxi. 6. 33.).

The rejoicing of the Apostles in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, was *the testimony of their conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, they had had their conversation in the world* (2 Cor. i. 12.).

And the discharge of his duty, together with the Holy Spirit of God, enabled the great Apostle St Paul, to go boldly to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that should befall him there. And though he knew that all they, among whom he had gone preaching the kingdom of God, should see his face no

more;

more; yet the expectation of bonds and afflictions did not move him, because he could take them to record that day, that he was pure from the blood of all men (Acts, xx.), and was resolved to go on in the faithful execution of his high trust.

With what courage and authority did he plead his cause, before a corrupt and licentious Felix?

How cheerfully did he answer for himself, when he was accused by the false and insinuating Tertullus? *They neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city, neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets; and have hope towards God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men (Ver. 12, 13, 14, 15, 16.).*

How bravely did he stand at the tribunal of Festus? With what powerful words did he demand justice of him? *Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Cæsar, have I offended any thing at all. To the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die; but if there be none of these things, whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them: I appeal unto Cæsar (Acts, xxv. 10, 11.).*

This the undaunted behaviour of innocence. This is the true spirit of Christianity, which strikes an awe upon its adversaries. And it was this that emboldened St. Paul, when he continued preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him (Acts, xxviii. 31.).

And if, after this glorious example of righteousness, we may look back to any other which the Old Testament can afford us, there is none greater than that of the three children of the captivity, that were upheld by their own integrity, and durst maintain it against the torrent of an envious faction, and the anger of an idolatrous king.

When they refused to comply with the impious edict of Nebuchadnezzar, and to worship the golden image which he had set up, and he threatened to cast them into the midst of a burning fiery furnace, with that profane ostentation, *Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?* with what calmness of mind did they receive his threatening! *O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter; if it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king: but if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship thy golden image which thou hast set up (Dan. iii.).*

Thus innocence will carry us with cheerfulness through every occurrence of life; and it will give us the firmest confidence at the approaches of death. Then the good man triumphs over the king of terrors, and breaks forth in the words of joy, *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory (1 Cor. xv. 55.)?* for he has no ghastly objects to affright him, no sins of injustice to cry out against him. But he remembers, that when *the ear heard him, then it blessed him, when the eye saw him, it gave witness to him. The blessing of them that were ready to perish now comes in full measure upon him, and he is comforted in all his pains, because he made the widow's heart to sing for joy. (Job, xxix.)*

It is no small part of our happiness to be at peace with ourselves, and the world; but the utmost that we can desire is to have a lively hope and confidence in God. Which is,

Thirdly, Another effect of a regular, uniform obedience to God's commandments.

We may deceive our own hearts, or be deceived by them; and it is not altogether impossible to escape the eye of the world; but no specious appearance can impose upon the God of wisdom; no secret sins can lie hid from his searching knowledge, no strength can defend, no covert can screen us from his infinite power. It therefore behoves us so to live, that his almighty arm may be our defence; that his wisdom may approve our conduct; that we may have reason to rejoice that his all-seeing eye was our witness.

Then the Lord will be our light, and our salvation, whom then shall we fear? The Lord

Lord will be the strength of our life, of whom then shall we be afraid? Though an host of men were laid against us, yet shall not our hearts be afraid, and though there rise up war against us, yet shall we put our trust in him (Psal. xxvii. 1. 3.).

Blessed is the man that has thus made God his friend, and, by the actions of an unblamable life, has presented himself, his soul and body, a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice to God. Being entirely devoted to him, he can resort to him in every danger and difficulty, and truly ask for his counsel to direct, and his assistance to deliver him.

That we may thus obtain his favour, we must keep his commandments and testimonies, and continually remember, that all our ways are before him. (Psal. cxix. 168.) We must not take our measures from the vain policy and uncertain affairs of this world, but resolve, that be the event what it will, it shall be our chief concern to please him, and that we will do nothing that is inconsistent with, but every thing that is most agreeable to, the law of God. To this we must apply our heart, and this must be the aim and end of all our endeavours. And whatsoever we are engaged in, we must not only consider, whether it will bring us any present satisfaction, or conduce to our worldly interest, but act with nobler views than these, and think with ourselves, whether it will bear the sight of a just and holy God, and render us acceptable to him, in whose favour is life.

This consideration will restrain us from any mean or sinful action, for we shall blush at the mention of it, if we set him always before us, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; and shall tremble at the thoughts of offending him, to whom power belongs.

We must look farther than this life, and not judge of our actions, as they appear to us, when they are done in secret, and when we are willing to deceive ourselves into a favourable opinion of them, but as they will appear in the great and terrible day of the Lord, when our conscience will represent them as they really are; when Satan will bring forth every accusation that can be alleged against us; when the books will be opened, in which every thought, word, and work, are faithfully recorded; and when the glorious company of the Apostles, the goodly fellow-

ship of the prophets, and the noble army of martyrs, will be the spectators of our honour or disgrace.

If we keep up an habitual sense of these things, we cannot but do our duty. And then with what comfort, with what satisfaction, with what delight, shall we look up to God, when our life is well-pleasing to him! How shall we be transported when we can reflect upon it without reproach, and have no cause to with back the time that is past, and have nothing to bewail, but our ordinary frailties and infirmities. How great and godlike is our happiness, when we can take a review of our life, and approve of it, as the Creator did, of all his works, when *he saw every thing that he had made, and beheld it was very good!* (Gen. i. 31.)

Then we shall enjoy the favour of God, when we shall most especially stand in need of his support; he will comfort us *when we lie upon our bed, and make all our bed easy in our sickness.* (Psal. xli. 3.) The thoughts of religion will refresh our soul, when all the riches of this world shall not at all avail us; and when a multitude of diseases lay siege against us, they will yield us relief and satisfaction. And when *the snares of death compass us round about, we shall put our confidence in him, who killeth and maketh alive, who bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up; and he will deliver our soul from death, our eyes from tears, and our feet from falling* (Psal. cxvi. 3. 8. — 1 Sam. ii. 6.).

And when we go forth to judgment, the solemnity of that awful trial will strike no terror upon us, we shall behold *the Lord coming with ten thousands of his saints*, without any dread or concern; and shall lift up our heads with joy to the great tribunal. *Then shall the righteous man stand with great boldness, before the face of such as have afflicted him, and made no account of his labours. When they see it, they shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the strangeness of his salvation, so far beyond all that they looked for; and they repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit, shall say within themselves, This was he, whom we had sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproach. We fools counted his life madness, and his end to be without honour. How is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints?* (Wisd. v. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.)

The Judge of the whole world will

* N

look

look graciously upon him, and enliven him with the beams of his favour. *The assembly of just men made perfect* will admire the man that is approved by the God of holiness. And angels and archangels will rejoice at the sight of his happiness.

This is the man whom God delights to honour, and *such honour have all his saints* (Psal. cxlix. 9.).

Let us therefore consider the wisdom of being religious. It is this that will give us peace with ourselves, such peace as the world cannot give. For this will make us regardless of the evils of life; and without this, all the pleasures of the world can never make us happy.

This will procure us the good-will of mankind, and enable us to meet every one with an unshaken confidence.

This will recommend us to God, who is our best friend, our watchful protector, who will lead us by the hand through all the accidents of this world, and will be our *exceeding great reward* (Gen. xv. 1.) in the other.

And this will stand the test of the most impartial judgment, when all other wisdom will be ashamed to appear.

Let us therefore again remember the resolution of Job, and let each of us say with him, *Till I die, I will not remove my integrity from me; my righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.*

S E R M O N XI.

Nathan's Application to David.

2 SAM. xiii. 7.

Thou art the man.

THE train of sins which gave occasion to this reproof, the nature of the reproof itself, and the effect which it wrought upon the person reproofed, are as remarkable as any part of the Holy Scripture, and highly deserve our serious consideration.

So prone is even the just man to fall, that David, an eminent and distinguished example of righteousness, fell into the foulest and most shameful wickedness, and continued under the guilt of repeated transgressions.

While he was *walking upon the roof of*

his house he saw *Bathsheba, the beautiful wife of Uriah*, and was struck with the fatally pleasing object; and his reason and conscience being lulled asleep, he yielded to the flattering temptation, and debased himself by the enjoyment of his lust.

Nor did he stop here; but having once violated his innocence, he suffered it to be laid waste, by a yet more heinous sin, that got the dominion over him. (Psal. xix. 13.)

He not only endeavoured to repeat the vicious enjoyment, but to secure the continuance of it, and *strengthen himself in his wickedness* (Psal. lii. 8.). He sent for Uriah the Hittite, the unhappy obstacle that stood in his way, resolving to accomplish his death.

And when he came to the palace of the king, he received him with the endearing expressions of pretended kindness, and all the smiling treachery of a court.

Uriah declined his extraordinary favours with the greatest modesty and deference, and was unwilling to go to his house and *fare delicately, while the ark, and Israel, and Judah abode in tents, and the servants of his Lord were encamped in the open fields* (2 Sam. xi. 11.).

Such modesty as this, one might have thought, would have changed the purpose of the king, and kindled some repenting in his heart. But he was still bent on his destruction, and made him, in some measure, the instrument of it.

For *he wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah, and he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die.* (Ver. 14, 15.)

A commission fraught with blood and cruelty, and as base a device as ever was contrived by the most artful and exquisite villany.

The innocent, the brave, the faithful Uriah goes forth (as he imagines) to fight in the defence of his prince and country; but in reality, to be deserted by a perfidious army, and fall a sacrifice to the imperious demands of David's lust.

And when the agreeable message was brought, that *Uriah was dead*, and the days of mourning were past, *David sent for Bathsheba to his house, and she became his wife* (2 Sam. xi. 27.).

Behold the amazing progress and consummation of his guilt! and behold a sinner

inner covered with vice, and (as we might justly fear) ripe for destruction.

But now the mercy of God looked down upon him, and *plucked him as a firebrand out of the fire. God sent down from on high to fetch him back to himself, and take him out of the depths of sin. He delivered him from his strongest enemy, and from them which hated him; for, alas, they had been too mighty for him. He brought him forth into a place of liberty; he brought him forth, even because he had a favour unto him* (Psal. xviii. 16, 17. 19.).

Nathan, the messenger of the most high God, was sent to represent his case, and describe the measure of his guilt. And pursuant to his important commission, he set before him the barbarous oppression of a great rich man, and an inhuman injury done by him to his poor helpless neighbour.

And when David heard the surprizing story, he thought it concerned an unknown person: a person unknown, because, alas, he was unknown to himself.

His indignation immediately arose, and he expressed his just resentment of the unnatural crime. *His anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die, because he had no pity* (2 Sam. xii. 5, 6.).

Having thus unawares passed sentence upon himself, and shewn the utmost abhorrence of his baseness, the prophet struck him to the heart with his own reflections, and brought them home to him, *sith, Thou art the man.*

The once hardened sinner receives the deepest impression from these powerful words, and shakes off the sleep of sin. And happy, unspeakably happy, is David, that he lifts up his eyes before he is in flames.

He confesses his crime with a perfect sense of the heinousness of it; and as soon as he acknowledges his sin against the Lord, the prophet gives him this welcome assurance, *The Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die* (Ver. 13.).

That we may make a proper use of this example, it will be necessary to form,

First, A full and perfect notion of the baseness and heinousness of sin in general.

And, Secondly, Of our own particular sins.

And then,

Thirdly, To bring all our censures

home, and confine them to ourselves, till we utterly abhor and forsake our vices.

And, first, We are to form a full and perfect notion of the baseness and heinousness of sin in general.

This is absolutely necessary to be done before we can conceive a just indignation against those particular sins, that have taken possession of our bosom, and gotten an ascendant over us.

And we shall behold the evil of sin in its exact proportion, if we consider it as injurious to God, our neighbour, and ourselves. With respect to God, it is offensive to a being of infinite goodness, wisdom, holiness, and justice.

He is the fountain and fulness of goodness. All the portions of it that are scattered amongst an innumerable variety of creatures, are derived from him, and are but the imperfect beams that flow from his amiable perfection. He has displayed it in this lower world, ever since he laid the foundations of it; and he will manifest it more and more, till this wonderful building is dissolved.

And though the heavens and the earth shall perish, and time itself shall come to an end, this glorious attribute will have no bounds or period, but extend itself as far as his presence, which is infinite, and reach through all the ages of eternity, which can never be measured.

And therefore to provoke a being that is absolutely good in himself, and perpetually delights in doing good, which he does most especially to man: this carries something so shocking and horrid in its nature, that, if we think at all, we must tremble at the thoughts of it. It bears all the marks of the most odious and abominable object, and provokes every passion of our mind to join in its condemnation. It is covered with the blackness and darkness of ingratitude, and to give the greatest blackness to its darkness, it is the very worst kind of ingratitude.

When we behold a good man that is tender of his fellow-creatures, and abstains from the least appearance of an injury, we cannot but highly regard and esteem him.

When we find that he not only avoids the approaches of evil, but is also constantly employed in doing good, and makes it his meat and drink, his pleasure and delight, to relieve the poor, to protect the fatherless, and support the widow:

his goodness inclines us to think his person sacred, and renders us afraid to grieve or offend him. And if at any time we are going to form a purpose prejudicial to him, a sudden dread gives a check to the conception, and all that is human in our breasts, rises up immediately, and bids us have nothing to do with that good man.

And if we are constrained to pay this respect to the image of God, how much more ought we to pay it to God himself, who is the head-spring of all those virtues, that demand the veneration of mankind, and in whose hand the best of men are but instruments that work his pleasure, and convey his benefits to his creatures?

And if it is unnatural to injure those who act in his stead, how much more unnatural is it, to put him to grief, who gives us all the blessings of this mortal life, and who made us immortal, that he might make us happy to all eternity?

We may take another view of the baseness of sin, as it is contrary to his wisdom. And we shall certainly hate and abhor it in this view, if we have any sense of the dignity of our nature, any value for the better part of ourselves?

For God created us *after his own likeness*, and placed us but *a little lower than the angels*, capable of attaining to a nearer resemblance of him, and of rising still higher, till we are *equal to the angels of God*.

But sin debases and degrades us, blots out the lines of the divine image, and more than levels us with the beasts that perish.

Every instance of it is folly even in our own sight, and much more in the sight of him, who charges the most perfect of his creatures with a defect of wisdom.

The oftener we repeat it, so much the more unlike we are to him; and every degree of guilt is a fresh and palpable proof of folly. Whatsoever is contrary to the divine wisdom, is also contrary to human reason; and whatsoever is unreasonable, creates an uneasy reflection in the person that commits it. If we are truly sensible of it, we cannot but be miserable; and if we are not truly sensible of it, we are yet more miserable, because we have sinned ourselves into a state of thick

darkness, and are so widely distant from the God of wisdom.

And the same loathsome evil is utterly disagreeable to his unspotted holiness. The least impurity is discerned and abhorred by his jealous eye, and if he would be extreme to punish what we have done amiss, he might punish us even for the smallest dust of our corruption.

Our best actions stand in need of his pardon, *for we are all as an unclean thing before him, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags* (Isa. lxiv. 6.).

Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight; how much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water? (Job, xv. 15, 16.)

And if our lesser spots are disagreeable to him, with what displeasure must he observe our grosser stains, and those sins that are of the deepest dye?

Let us consider what an appearance they make before him. Such is their vileness, that they cannot bear our own examination, or stand the test of our impartial thoughts. We are forced to withdraw our minds from attending to them, and to be absent as much as we can, while we commit them. And when the commission is past, we endeavour to draw the veil of forgetfulness over them, and would gladly bury them in darkness for ever.

The accomplices in guilt are afraid of betraying their blushes to each other, and if they lift up their eyes in the midst of a sinful action, they look with fear and suspicion, conscious of their own shame, and dreading mutual contempt.

The unexpected sight of a good man does yet more disturb them. Before he can speak with his tongue, they seem to be pierced with his reproofs, and prevent his earliest applications to them, with the words of Ahab, *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?* (1 Kings, xxi. 20.)

So base is sin, in the opinion of the sinner himself, so ugly does it appear when none but the partaker of his guilt beholds it, and so much more ugly when the righteous man finds him out! He is then surprized as the keepers were, who *shook and became as dead men, when the angel of the Lord descended from heaven to proclaim our Saviour's resurrection.* (Mat. xxviii. 2. 4.)

Hence we may form an imperfect draught of sin, as it appears to him, who sees it within and without, and has a naked view of all its horrors, from its first conception, till *it is finished and brings forth death.* (Jam. i. 15.)

Which leads to another consideration of it, as it offends his justice. Our great lawgiver is infinitely just: his nature is the perfect pattern of truth and equity, and his will the certain, unalterable measure of right and wrong. He has not given us laws, barely to exercise his authority, or manifest his power, but has vouchsafed us a copy of himself, to direct us in the way to happiness, and has interwoven our interest with our duty.

His laws were good in themselves from all eternity, flowing from the essential goodness of the divine nature, and implanted in the nature of man at his creation.

Every sin is a deviation from them, still winding farther into the paths of error, and growing crooked like the folds of the serpent.

And if the judicious artist can hardly endure the sight of a flaw in his building; if the exact, observing eye is offended at beholding a line irregularly drawn; and if the ear of the skilful musician is in an instant grated with the harsh, unpleasant sounds of an instrument that is out of tune; can we imagine that a God of perfect justice can bear with our actions, that wander from the sure, never-failing rules of our duty, and are contrary to the wisdom of God, and the reason of man?

No, assuredly, he hates them with an utter hatred, and will one day break forth with all the severity of displeasure.

He denounced his threatnings with a just regard to the evil of sin; and how dreadful soever they are, they are but proportioned to the heinousness of it. They are grounded on undeniable reason, and they will not be executed upon us, till he has used all the means of reclaiming us, but in vain. And when the measure of our guilt is full, and we are ripe for vengeance, he will perform *his strange work, and be terrible in his doings towards us. Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from his law.* (Mat. v. 18.) And even when heaven and earth are passed away, his threatnings shall

continue in their full force, and never be abated.

Having considered the baseness and heinousness of sin, with respect to God, we are now to consider it as it relates to our neighbour.

And we may not improperly divide it, into secret injustice, and open oppression; vices nearly allied, how much soever they may seem to differ from one another. For the man that injures his neighbour secretly, would openly trample upon him, were it in his power; and he that exercises himself in the arbitrary acts of oppression, would stoop to the closer artifices of villainy, did not his power render it unnecessary.

Let any one impartially reflect, and he will immediately acknowledge the baseness of fraud and treachery. It frequently indeed puts on the specious names of wisdom and policy; and the children of this world admire themselves for their threwd, dexterous conduct.

But let them remember, that their artful measures, and crafty schemes, are the offspring of him who is the father of lies; and they are no longer useful and effectual, than while they are concealed by the prince of darkness.

And it is not probable they should be long concealed, since their fraudulent brethren are perpetually at work, in the same depths of Satan, and may either by design or accident meet with them in their beloved hiding places, and unexpectedly countermine them.

And there is not a more despicable, useless wretch, than a detected villain. He is unable to do good, and (which is infinitely worse in his account) he is incapable of doing mischief.

The persons whom the deceitful betray and injure, render their proceedings yet more scandalous. For they are either the weak and unwary, or the plain honest man. And is it a proof of wisdom to deceive the weak and unwary? Is there any glory in imposing upon an honest man?

Their guilt is no less, if they blast their neighbour's fame, than if they injure him in his person and fortune. Nay, it is rather greater, for a wound in his body may hurt no one but himself, and a loss in his fortune may be repaired; but the loss of his good name may affect the latest posterity: an unjust censure strikes

at the very root, and too often entails itself upon a family, and goes down from generation to generation.

As to oppression, it implies the use of power, and it is certainly the worst abuse of it. For it might be employed to the noblest purposes, and raise a man to the nearest resemblance of the Almighty, who exercises his power in doing good.

But the oppressor applies it to the most unnatural, barbarous uses, to grind the poor, who are unable to contend with him; or, in other words, to trample upon a worm, to break a leaf driven to and fro, and to pursue the dry stubble (Job, xiii. 25.).

He causes the naked to lodge without clothing, that they have no covering in the cold. They are wet with the showers of the mountains, and embrace the rock for want of shelter. He plucks the fatherless from the breast, and takes a pledge from the poor (Job, xxiv. 7, 8, 9.).

The parable of Nathan gives us a full description of him. *There were two men in one city, the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe-lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller to the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock, and of his own herd, to dress for the way-faring man, that was come unto him, but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him. (2 Sam. xii. 1, 2, 3, 4.)*

Is not our anger greatly kindled against him, as soon as we hear of this inhuman instance of oppression? and are we not ready to say with David, *As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die* (Verse 5.).

But we shall conceive a yet greater abhorrence of sin, if we consider it as injurious to ourselves.

It is this that extinguishes that glorious lamp, our reason; violates that faithful friend, our conscience; perverts and distorts our will, and delivers up the government of our minds, to those violent passions and affections that delight only in anarchy and confusion.

It overturns the order in which we were created, lays our immortal faculties on a

level with the dust, from whence our bodies were taken, and puts our viler earthly part in possession of an usurped dominion.

It engages us in the pursuit of improper pleasures, devotes us to the service of a lust, which can never satisfy us with true enjoyment, and withdraws us from those nobler pleasures, which alone can yield us true enjoyment.

It enlarges our desires, that we may be still tormented with importunate demands, receives fresh insolence from our compliance, and the more it is gratified, still the more remote it is from satisfaction.

It fixes our thoughts upon this short, uncertain life, and the shorter and more uncertain pleasures of the body; and teaches us to prefer them before the happiness of an immortal soul, and the rewards of eternity.

Such is the baseness and heinousness of sin in general!

But it is necessary to consider,

Secondly, Our own particular sins.

We cannot abhor the latter, till we are brought to a just abhorrence of the former; but we rest in vain, in a general notion of sin, unless we apply it to our own case, and draw the picture for ourselves: for herein lies the deceit that casts a mist before us, and flatters us into a false security. We cannot but acknowledge, that sin is justly the object of divine hatred, and no less justly the object of our own. We see the heinousness of it in other men, but we cannot so easily see it in ourselves. We imagine that we are not guilty of the same offences, or that there are peculiar circumstances to mitigate and lessen our guilt. We endeavour to draw up an excuse for our favourite sin, in those softening words, *Is it not a little one?* Or provided we indulge only our prevailing infirmity, we desire to compound with God, and offer Naaman's plea, hoping, *the Lord will pardon us in this thing* (2 Kings, v. 18.).

But, let us not be thus deceived, for it is hard to confine ourselves to one single sin. There is a strange connection in wickedness, and one link of the chain draws on the rest.

We are perhaps averse to this, or that particular sin, but we know not how soon our aversion may be worn away.

Our favourite sin may powerfully recommend

commend it, and train us at length from a slight embrace, to an intimate familiarity; we may insensibly entertain kinder thoughts of it, for it is natural enough to esteem our friend's acquaintance.

And farther, it is impossible to hate sin, upon a just foundation, whilst we retain an affection for any particular sin.

This may be more convenient to us, and another less, but we cannot abstain from either, with a due regard to the honour of God, or a perfect sense of the baseness of sin, unless we are resolved to abstain from both.

Let not therefore any one satisfy himself, because he is not as other men are, while he is only distinguished from them by his particular vices.

Let not the drunkard boast of himself, because he is not addicted to lust; neither let the man, that is free from drunkenness and lust, acquiesce in a vain opinion of himself, if he is possessed with pharisaical pride, villanous cunning, and diabolical dissimulation.

But, let every man fairly examine his own state, and all the circumstances of his guilt. Let him consider the extent and influence of it, how many he has injured by it; how often he has done violence to his conscience, and how often rejected the kind admonitions of the Holy Spirit; what mercies he has received, what afflictions he has suffered from the hand of God, and how little they have availed towards his repentance. And this will teach us,

Lastly, To bring all our censures home, and confine them to ourselves, till we utterly abhor and forsake our vices.

The conduct of our own lives, is an affair of so much difficulty, and affords us so much matter for employment every day, that if we were resolved to discharge it thoroughly, we could have no leisure to reflect upon the greater world without us.

And the real faults of the world are so many, and report and censure represents them as so many more, that if we pry into the affairs of others, we can never have time to look into our own,

One of these must be done, and the other may be very well left undone; as we cannot serve two masters, so we cannot attend to our own faults, and those of

others; it behoves us, therefore, to make a right use of our censures.

When we have strained our invention to aggravate our neighbour's guilt, and lay all the odious colours that calumny can cast upon it; when we have described him, as ungrateful to God, injurious to his brother, and even the worst of enemies to himself, let us change our first design, and try whether the disagreeable character will not suit ourselves.

It may be, it will stare upon us, like a picture that seems to direct its eyes to every one that looks upon it.

We are perhaps unwilling to open our breasts, and search all its retirements; we may therefore see ourselves by reflection; and when we have raised our indignation against a supposed criminal, we may pass sentence upon a real one, and give it the utmost force and sharpness, with, *Thou art the man.*

When we judge others, we may easily be deceived by false appearances, and our partiality may pronounce too severe a judgment.

But in ourselves, we are not liable to be thus mistaken; and if we deal faithfully with our souls, and acknowledge with David, that *we have sinned against the Lord*, our conscience will tell us, in the words of Nathan, *The Lord also hath put away your sin, you shall not die* (2 Sam. xii. 13.).

S E R M O N XII.

The Duty of forgiving our Enemies, recommended and enforced.

LUKE, xi. 4.

Forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.

THE crucified Jesus having made one full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, is gone up on high to the right hand of the Father, to continue his intercession for us; and offer the incense of our prayers, enforced with the infinite merits of his precious death.

But because we are foolish and ignorant, even as a beast before him, and unable to frame our petitions aright, therefore in compassion to our infirmities, he gave us an absolute form of prayer,

and taught us to present our petitions at the throne of grace, in words that came down from heaven.

And whatsoever is worthy to be the object of our desires, whether it be the glory of God, or the happiness of man; the food that sustains us for a day, or the bread that endureth for ever; the pardon of our sins, or an everlasting reward; a deliverance from all the evils, or the attainment of all the goods of time and eternity; more than we could have presumed to desire, and infinitely more than we can deserve; all these are summed up, and contained in this comprehensive form of prayer.

Every petition is of great importance, but none of greater than the petition for forgiveness of our trespasses; and to shew the importance of it, this alone has a condition annexed to it.

To promote peace on earth, the Father of mercies is pleased to prescribe the same measure to us, as we desire to receive from him; and to offer pardon and peace to his rebellious creatures, if they will but vouchsafe to forgive each other.

Our trespasses can no more be numbered than the hairs of our head, the stars of heaven, or the sands of the shore; and the weight of our guilt is too heavy to be borne by the most perfect of the sons of men. The pardon that is reached out to us, is of the utmost extent, and imports a deliverance from an eternity of misery. And yet our compassionate father lays only the light offences, which our brethren have committed against us, in the balance with our heinous transgressions against himself.

The greatest injuries, that we can receive from our enemies, are but as the light dust of the balance, and yet our forgiveness of them procures the pardon of our sins against God. The latter are written with a pen of iron, in the book of everlasting remembrance; and the former should be written but in dust, or scattered upon the waters; and, yet if we pass by the one, our offended God will blot out the other. To be forgiven of God, is so necessary to all the children of Adam; and to forgive our brethren, is so reasonable a duty, that we must be lost and abandoned for ever, if we do not hasten to forgive, that we may be forgiven.

To enforce this duty, I shall shew,
First, That we are not fit to pray to God:

Secondly, That we renounce his pardon:

Thirdly, That we mock and prevaricate with him: And,

Fourthly, That we turn our prayer into an imprecation, unless we forgive our brethren their trespasses.

And, First, That we are not fit to pray, unless we forgive our brethren their trespasses.

Prayer is to be offered up to God with our whole heart, and requires all the warmth and earnestness of our passions and affections. Both our duty and interest oblige us to address ourselves to him with the closest application: and if we consider the subject of our prayers, at all times, and especially when we ask for pardon, we cannot be cold and indifferent, we cannot but be pressing and importunate, we cannot *suffer our eyes to sleep, nor our eyelids to slumber, nor the temples of our head to take any rest*, till we have obtained the desired blessing.

But if we retain an implacable un forgiving temper; if the destruction of our supposed enemy be the object of our wishes and desires; if the violent flame of anger, or the secret lingering fire of malice burn within us, our devotions will lose their necessary zeal, and our disordered minds will leave the mercy-seat to pursue their revenge; nor can we expect that the spirit of God should descend upon our sacrifices, or his sacred fire come down from heaven, to shew his acceptance and approbation, while anger rages, or malice lurks within us: there is another flame that prevails over us, even that which is earthly, sensual, devilish. The accursed spirit possesses the heart, and pollutes the temple of the Holy Ghost; and we come in vain to the altar, till we have cleansed our hearts from this pollution, and composed them into a peaceable and friendly temper. And unless we thus qualify ourselves, we,

Secondly, Renounce God's pardon. When sinful man had lost the favour of God, and was condemned to die by a just and righteous sentence, he could not presume to hope for an alteration, much less could he expect a repeal of the dreadful decree; for he had no merit to procure it, nor could reason find out an expedient

expedient to satisfy the justice of God. But had God himself declared, that such an expedient might be found, and opened a door of hope, by shewing a bare possibility of forgiveness, would not the condemned criminals have submitted to any terms, and gladly have embraced the hardest that could have been imposed? And surely none more easy could have been imposed, than mutual forgiveness and charity to one another. Nay, had not this been required, had we been left to our own choice, the principles of gratitude, and all the ingenuous sentiments of human nature, must have prompted us to forgive.

When the Lord forgave his servant that owed him ten thousand talents, and was moved with compassion towards him and loosed him, though he might have sold him into slavery, with his wife and children, and all that he had, forasmuch as he had not to pay; it might be reasonably supposed, that the servant should immediately seek for his fellow-servants, and cancel all their debts, if not only one, but every one had owed him an hundred pence. Such generous usage naturally opens the heart, and inclines it to gratify itself, by a pleasing imitation of it; and had not truth itself assured us of it, and did not experience daily confirm it, we could hardly think it possible, that the servant should rigidly insist upon a debt of an hundred pence, and cast his fellow-servant into prison, when he humbly besought him to have patience with him (Matth. xviii.). All our sins are instances of folly and ingratitude, but none are more foolish and ungrateful, than an obstinate refusal to forgive our brother, when God has made it the condition of our own forgiveness.

That infinite wisdom should contrive the means of our reconciliation; and that infinite goodness should make an atonement for us: that the Son of God should be born in the weakness of our flesh, and endure the multitude of our infirmities: that he should pass through the contempt, the scorn, the blasphemies of men; that he should almost sink under the weight of our sorrows in the garden: that he should say, It is finished, having paid down the full price of our ransom; and yet, that we should render all this ineffectual to our salvation; that we should spurn at forgiveness, and disdain to be saved;

that the only difficulty should proceed from ourselves; and we should be eternally miserable, because we were unnatural, unrelenting, and unmerciful; this surely is enough to fill the heavens and the earth with astonishment; and to leave us without excuse for ever and ever.

If we hold fast our enmity to one another, whilst God is willing to be at peace with us, we cast the vilest indignities and reflections upon him; we lessen his honour and magnify our own; we esteem our offences against him as a thing of nought, and value the injuries that are done to us, at the dearest rate; as if our offences against God might easily be expiated, and the offences against us could admit of no expiation.

And yet what are the most heinous injuries that we are capable of receiving? We generally make a wrong estimate of these things, and throw all the weight we can into our own scale; we allow nothing for ignorance, inadvertency, nor surprize, but add all the aggravating circumstances that we can possibly invent, to enhance our brother's transgressions. But when our invention or malice has done its worst; when we have placed ourselves in the fairest view, and represented our adversary in the blackest colours; yet no real or imaginary circumstances can render the wrongs that we have suffered, of equal weight or malignity with our guilt towards God.

Is it our friend that has injured us? Has he enjoyed continual instances of our kindness? Have we served him in the most generous, disinterested manner? And has he given us the basest and most dissingenuous usage? Has he made the most shameful return; and treacherously wounded us in the most tender part? Yet has not God been more our friend? Has he not visited us with mercies every moment? Could his kindness to us promote his interest, or be profitable to him? And have not we basely betrayed him, insolently trampled upon his honour, and delighted to put him to grief? And is there any word in our tongue, or in all the languages in the world, expressive of baseness and ingratitude, that may not with the strictest justice be applied to us? Can we answer these questions without condemning ourselves? Or, can we pretend to draw a comparison, when there

there is hardly the shadow of a resemblance?

But suppose that a parent is offended by an obdurate and rebellious son; we will consider the greatest obligations that the former is capable of heaping upon the latter. He has been the instrument of bringing him into life; he has watched over him, with the tenderest care, from the moment of his birth, supported him in the weakness of his infancy, assisted the growing strength of youth, and provided a relief for the infirmities of age. He hath rejoiced in his joys, and been pierced through with his sorrows, and yearned over him with as much affection, as melted the heart of Jacob, when he embraced and clave to his well-beloved son Joseph. And we will suppose (a hard supposition) that his son has wearied him with perverseness, and laboured to fill up the measure of ingratitude; yet, even then there is room for forgiveness, and there is a glorious example to recommend it to him. And it is more than just severity to cut him off for ever, and deny him the least portion of his blessing. This exceeds the compass of his offences, and seems to reach after a greater power than God has given him. For he that punishes till death, endeavours to carry his revenge beyond it; and by exerting the utmost that he can, he shews his malicious desire of doing more: and in the mean time is forgetful of our common Father in Heaven.

For he alone is the author and giver of life; and he watches over the imperfect infant in the womb, and guards him against those dangers which no fatherly care can foresee, or prevent; he protects and defends him, while he lies upon his mother's knees, or hangs upon her breasts; he turns his food into nourishment, and confirms the tender plant, from its first springing up into life, till it rises to its perfect height; and he also keeps it from falling, while the evils of time gradually bow it down towards the grave: and this nursing father is offended by his offspring every hour, and every moment of life. Nothing but his mercy can surpass the offences that are offered to him; and though they are multiplied continually, he forbears to withdraw his blessings; he strives to overcome evil with good; and if he perceives the least tendency towards repentance, he runs

forth to meet it, and impatiently waits for it. He is always ready to hear, till his children refuse to pray; and even in the last hour, he opens his arms to receive them.

It is impossible to find out any injury done by man, that equals the least of our sins against God. They are widely different in their nature, and bear no proportion to each other. And there is still a wider difference between the persons injured. For the inequality between the greatest and least of men is but barely discernible, and grounded only on a small advantage of power, wisdom, or goodness. And every seeming excellence that adorns and distinguishes one from another, and every valuable endowment is no more than the shadow of the divine perfections, and but the scatterings of that bountiful hand which dispenses blessings to a world of creatures. The fullness of power, wisdom, holiness, and goodness, is in him alone that created them. And our transgressions against him rise in proportion to the excellence of his nature, and the dignity of his attributes, and lay a heavy weight of guilt upon us, because we violate his pure and awful majesty.

We can therefore draw no objection against forgiving our brethren from the nature of the offence, or from the state of the person offended; much less can we draw any objection from the multitude of their offences.

Perhaps our brother has abused our kindness, and made our wounds bleed afresh, though we have frequently forgiven him. But he hardly began to injure us, as soon as he was capable of doing it; he has hardly continued to repeat it every day; much less has he multiplied injuries to seventy times seven in one day. But our sins against God began with our being, were increased and aggravated as soon as we knew the difference between good and evil, and have increased and multiplied together with the moments of our life.

We continually want relief from the hand of God, and are more and more indebted to him. We cannot presume to expect a supply of our wants, before we have asked for pardon; and every time that we desire his blessings, we have fresh occasion to beg for forgiveness. For we are compassed about with a cloud of trespasses,

passes, and a new train of sins follows us even to the altar; and we cannot think how much we want forgiveness, without thinking also, how much we are obliged to forgive.

And should our adversary injure us as often as we offend God (which is indeed impossible), we should even then rejoice, that we have such frequent opportunities of performing the conditions required of us, and imitating the mercy of God. When we appear in the presence of God, *our iniquities take hold of us, and we are not able to look up, because our heart faileth us*; and yet in this deplorable condition, the divine compassion waits for us; and we know that our pardon will be sealed in heaven, if we will repent and forgive our offending brethren. Can we then refuse to embrace this great salvation, and are we discouraged at these reasonable terms, Do this, and your sins shall be forgiven you?

Many there are that think it a hard saying, *to love their enemies, and overcome evil with good*; but why should it be thought a thing unreasonable with you, to deal with our enemies, as we desire God should deal with us?

We are in a state of rebellion against God, and yet we beseech him, not only to pardon us, not only to bear with us, but to heap his blessings upon us; the blessings of time, and the happiness of eternity: and surely nothing but the fullness of love, can move him to withdraw his avenging hand, and pursue us with offices of kindness, through all the portions of time, and the ages of eternity.

Great was the distance between God and us, even before we fell from innocence; and our sins had made a yet greater distance, and farther separated between us and him; and though we could make no advances towards him, nor move one step towards a reconciliation, yet he vouchsafed to close the difference, and came so near to us, as to take our nature upon him, and not only our nature, but the burthen of our sins. He was so far from retaining his enmity, and cherishing his just indignation, that he purchased our peace at an infinite price; and gave up himself a sacrifice for us.

And can we still indulge our passions, when he intreats us to subdue them? Shall we refuse to sacrifice our pride, and our revenge, when our Redeemer beseeches

us to renounce them? Surely every man must desire the pardon of God; surely no man can think it too hard to forgive his brother, for the sake of God's pardon.

For, thirdly, Unless we perform this condition, we mock and prevaricate with him.

Our duty and our necessities oblige us to frequent the throne of grace with our prayers. Our wants and our obligations are new every morning, and press upon us in all our paths by day, and compass about our bed by night. Our infirmities constrain us to lift up our voice to heaven, and the time of need returns so often, that we must in compassion to ourselves, often return to prayer; and we cannot but cry unto God in the form of prayer which he himself has taught us. And if we repeat that form of prayer, we make the forgiveness of our brethren, the condition of obtaining our own forgiveness.

Whensoever we fly to the mercy-seat, we pretend to have cancelled all our brother's debts, and to have cast our enmity behind us. The purposes of a malicious heart, and the studied contrivances of revenge, are inconsistent with these professions. There is not room for an habitual settled hatred, between the necessary returns of prayer. For if we were really in charity with our brother, when we offered our morning sacrifice to God, and sincerely forgive all the wrongs we have received, when we attend the evening service, we shall then truly govern our passions, and *let not the sun go down or rise upon our wrath*. But dreadful is our prevarication, unless we sincerely forgive: we know that God discerneth the secrets of the heart, and therefore to him doth all flesh come: and yet we presume to mock him with vain pretences, and violate the articles of peace, even while we seem to accept of them. One would think it scarcely possible to beg for pardon, without being in earnest; or to be regardless of salvation, when we send up our petitions for it; and yet unless we forgive our brethren, we deal in a ludicrous manner with the Almighty, and are not in earnest when we mention the terms of peace.

Vile wretched man! Better were it for thee not to pray at all, than to pray without forgiving thy brethren. Thou deceivest thyself; and how importunate
foever

soever thou art, thou really dost not desire pardon at the hands of God: for thou beseechest him only to forgive as thou hast forgiven, and since thou hast not done the one, thou canst not expect the other; thy own mouth condemneth thee, and thy prayer is turned into a contradiction.

Nor is this all: But, fourthly, It becomes an imprecation. It greatly concerns every man, to consider the state and condition of his mind, before he enters into the presence of God; if no violent passion disturbs his breast, no secret malice preys upon it, he is qualified to beg for the pardon of his sins. But if he indulges the restless thoughts of revenge, the rancour and bitterness of hatred, and the never-dying worm of malice, his prayer will be an abomination, and bring down curses upon his head.

Let him consider what he purposes to do to his enemy; whether he does not pant after his destruction, and is not framing a snare to entangle his feet in the way of death; let him survey the dark corners of his heart, and see what blood and cruelty is lurking there; and then let him ask himself, whether he does not call for the same unmerciful usage, the same sudden revenge, the same dreadful destruction from God, as he earnestly desires to bring upon his brother. The words of his prayers are not to be regarded, neither do they bear the natural construction, but are to be interpreted by his uncharitable wishes, desires, and designs. Lord, (says he) forgive me my trespasses, as I forgive them that trespass against me; that is, Thou knowest, O Lord, that I do not forgive them, but wait for the hour of revenge, and would (if possible) enjoy it to the full this very instant, and glut my passion with swift and devouring destruction: therefore, O Lord, I beseech thee deal with me, as I would deal with mine enemies, and snatch me hence to suffer thy eternal indignation. How unnatural soever this imprecation may seem to be, how much soever it may shock every one, that has the least remains of humanity, yet the prayer of the uncharitable man is actually turned into this very imprecation. Let us therefore sacrifice all malice and hatred, and all desires of revenge, to the Prince of Peace. Let us learn, after his example, to love our enemies, and esteem

every man as our brother, and our friend. Let us consider how much it concerns us, that our pardon should be sealed in heaven, before we go hence, and be no more seen. Let us therefore remove every let and hindrance, that may occasion a moment's delay. And, let us never lay down to sleep without being at peace with the whole world. Let us agree with our adversary, while we are yet in the way; and, let not the Judge surprize us in a state of enmity, lest our passion should become our eternal tormenter, and our malice should be an unquenchable fire. Let us remember the words of the sons of Sirach, *He that revengeth shall find vengeance from the Lord, and he shall surely keep his sin in remembrance. Forgive thy neighbour the hurt that he hath done unto thee, so shall thy sins also be forgiven when thou prayest. One man beareth hatred against another, and doth he seek pardon from the Lord? He sheweth no mercy to a man, which is like himself, and doth he ask forgiveness of his own sins? If he that is but flesh nourishes hatred, who will intreat for pardon of his sins? Remember thy end, and let enmity cease; remember corruption and death, and abide in the commandments.* (Eccles. xxviii.)

S E R M O N XIII.

THE Manifestation of the Divine Glory.

Exod. xxxiii. 18, 19.

And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.
And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee.

GREAT was the condescension of the Almighty, in vouchsafing to speak to sinful dust and ashes! Great also was his mercy, in preserving a people compassed about with infirmities, and holding their soul in life, when they heard him speak out of the midst of the fire, and saw the mountain tremble at the terrors of his presence.

But notwithstanding this mercy and condescension, the people were justly afraid to hear his voice a second time, and behold another manifestation of his dreadful Majesty; and it is not difficult to account for those astonishing fears, which

which bade them stand afar off, when Moses approached to the Lord of glory.

But how shall we account for his drawing near to the thick darkness where God was? It was indeed in obedience to the divine command. But how could mortal man hope to enter into the presence of God, and live? With what words shall we express, how shall we draw the measure of that goodness which enabled him to bear it?

Behold the God of mercy and compassion speaks unto *Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend!* and the meekest of men was emboldened to beseech him, to shew him his glory; and so gracious was he to his righteous servant, that he answered his request with this declaration, *I will make all my goodness pass before thee.*

Though we cannot yet attain to this delightful view, and can guess but uncertainly at the manner of this manifestation, yet we cannot but desire to partake with Moses; though we are furrounded with clouds and thick darkness, yet we cannot but endeavour to break through, and gaze at that amiable perfection which the Lord permitted to pass before him. May the same compassion, which guarded and strengthened Moses, while he beheld the glory of the divine nature, pardon my presumption in attempting to explain this wonderful part of the sacred history.

And, first, I shall with reverence inquire, why he shewed him only his goodness, when he desired to see his glory.

Secondly, In what sense we may suppose that his goodness passed before him.

And, thirdly, What use we should make of this gracious dispensation.

And, first, He might shew him only his goodness, to intimate that his goodness is his greatest glory. When we speak of the divine perfections, it is indeed improper to say, that one is afore, or after other; one is greater or less than another: for since all are infinite, they admit of no degrees of comparison, but are equally glorious, equally exceed the measure of our capacities, and the line of human reason. But the Almighty has been pleased to stoop to our weakness, and speak after the manner of men, in regard to our infirmities. And since there is not a word in our tongue, that can justly express the majesty of God,

we may humbly hope, that he will not be extreme to mark the absurdity of our thoughts, or expressions; for we can but *speak as a child, and think as a child*, concerning him; and the wisest of men is *foolish and ignorant, even as a beast before him.*

Though each of the perfections of God is full of glory, yet he seems to delight more particularly in his goodness, and to illustrate and distinguish himself by the exercise of it. It may be called his favorite attribute, which he chooses, which he rejoices to present to us: the others demand our reverence, but this engages our love. With this he meets us in all our ways, and even constrains us to behold the light of his countenance: but the other he mercifully conceals, or shews but a little part of them; and turns away his face from us, that he may hide his terrors.

With this goodness he looks graciously upon us, as upon the camp of Israel, when he led them through the sea; but with his other perfections, he would be almost as dreadful to us as to the host of the Egyptians, *when he looked through the pillar of fire, and troubled the host.* (Ex. xiv. 24.)

His goodness arises like the Sun of Righteousness with healing in its wings, and dispenses a mild and cheerful light, like the beauty of the morning, when the day breaks, and the shadows flee away.

It does not appear with a dazzling glory, to strike us down to the earth, and smite us with blindness; or with a countenance like lightning, to make us shake, and become as dead men: but with the meekness and gentleness of Joseph, when he comforted his trembling brethren with, *Behold your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh to you* (Gen. xlv. 12.); and of a greater than Joseph, when he returned from the grave, to his afflicted disciples, saying, *Why are ye troubled, and why do thoughts arise in your hearts, behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself.* (Luke, xxiv. 38, 39.) Which leads me to another reason, for which we may suppose, that the Almighty promised only to shew his goodness to Moses: namely, because he was unable to bear the view of his other perfections.

The very sight of his power is enough to destroy the mightiest of the sons of men: it need not exert itself against them,

them, if it does but appear before them, they are gone. His word created the world out of nothing, and can in an instant reduce it to nothing again. *With his strength he set fast the mountains; and with the breath of his displeasure they shall be scattered, and the hills shall melt away.*

It was therefore in compassion to the weakness of Moses, that *the Lord covered him with his hand*, and spread his shadow over him, that he might not perish at the sight of his power; for *great is his power; yea, and his wisdom is infinite.* (Psalm cxlvii. 5.)

Human reason, in its first estate, bore but a faint resemblance of the wisdom of God; and the stream, that flowed from the fountain of light, is now so grossly polluted, so full of corruption, that it dares not behold its divine original; but is amazed and confounded, if it looks toward the source from whence it sprung. Our thoughts and conceptions arise from the uncertain reports of our senses; our judgments are biased by prejudice; our positive conclusions are no more than arbitrary conjectures; and even our surest maxims of wisdom and policy, are compassed about with darkness and error; and the eye of reason, which is weak in itself, must be much more weakened, if it attempts to behold the piercing light of divine wisdom.

When God had poured down an extraordinary measure of wisdom upon Solomon, it quite over-powered *the queen of Sheba*, and there was no more spirit in her (1 Kings, x.), after she had observed the excellent understanding that was shed upon him. And if there was so much force in a portion of wisdom, how much greater must there be in the fullness of it? If that which was liable to vanity and sin, and which quickly lost itself in wickedness and folly, was an object worthy of admiration; how wonderful is that wisdom, which is subject to no variableness, nor shadow of turning! If that which enabled him to go in and out before his great people, and govern them prudently, during a short space of time, was a gift preferable to long life, riches, and honour; how shall we sufficiently adore that infinite wisdom, which governs all the nations; and by its unerring policy orders and disposes all the changes and chances of the world, from the beginning to the end of time?

And sinful man is less capable of beholding the holiness, than the wisdom of God. The shameful tokens of his corruption are so plain upon him, and he is so defiled with the leprosy of wickedness, that he cannot bear the sight of himself, and is conscious of his shame, even while the darkness covers him. How then can he appear before a pure and holy God; or enter into that dreadful presence which would shew him yet more plainly to himself? *It were easier for the Ethiopian to change his skin, and the leopard his spots*, than for the sinner to lift up his eyes to the purity of the divine nature, and then reflect upon his own filthiness, without horror and confusion.

Though holiness is in itself an amiable spectacle, and shines forth in perfect beauty; yet our present frailty will not permit us to dwell upon so glorious an object; nor can we presume to draw near to it, until we are washed in the blood of the Lamb, and clothed with *white robes, which are the righteousness of the saints.*

And the divine justice is an object yet more dreadful: for this sacred attribute never departs from its eternal rules, but is always uniform, and agreeable to itself; and as it hates our sins, with an utter hatred, and cannot but assert its own honour, by inflicting the punishment that is due to them, so we can never think of it, but with a sense of guilt, and an expectation of vengeance.

The God of justice will not indeed let virtue pass unrewarded; but even our best actions are unworthy of a reward; and cannot pretend even to claim a pardon. *The righteous man falls seven times a day*, and therefore could derive nothing but terror from considering the justice of God, were he not also to consider his boundless goodness. And though the innocence of Moses could have encouraged him to stand with great boldness before a righteous God; though he had no reason to fear, that vengeance would overtake himself, yet he must have been afraid for the sake of others, and been dismayed at the thoughts of those miserable creatures, that pursue their own destruction, and constrain God's justice to draw its sword, and make their plagues wonderful; for perfect innocence must tremble at the appearance of the destroying angel, though it were assured, that

the plague should not come nigh itself; it yet must grieve for the thousand that fall beside it, and the ten thousand at its right-hand.

There is yet another reason, for which the Almighty might promise to shew only his goodness; namely, That this should be as the veil to cover his other perfections, and they should be clothed, and (I had almost said) adorned with goodness. This is the only manifestation of them that has ever been vouchsafed to us; and by this, their majesty condescends to us, and becomes even delightful to our sight. His goodness moved him to create us, and to make us capable of knowing him; and when he made himself known to us, all that he revealed of himself was goodness. His providence gathers us under its wings, that this gracious attribute may be our protection; and his banner over us is love. That power which is able to drive asunder the nations, and rend the rocks in pieces, is continually employed in the exercise of his kindness, and is almighty in doing good. It brought the earth and the fulness thereof into being, that it might shed abroad his treasures; and called a multitude of creatures into life, that the instances of his bounty might still increase and multiply.

His wisdom contrives the most effectual means of promoting our interest, and guides and turns the various occurrences of the world, that they may minister to our happiness.

His knowledge has the earliest foresight of our wants, and even takes our cares upon itself, and prepares a suitable supply for all our necessities. His universal presence is an universal benefit, and he almost seems to be every where present, for this end, that his goodness may be every where present also. No place or time can confine it; but it spreads through the whole compass of nature, and reaches infinitely beyond this transitory scene. And as all the measures of time, and an unmeasurable eternity, are open at one view to God, so he at once beholds the glorious variety of blessings, which he bestows for ever and ever; and at once enjoys an eternity of goodness.

And his justice has such a regard to this merciful perfection, that it forbears to destroy the sinner, and is willing to be satisfied with the punishment of sin.

The incarnation of the Son of God afforded the most agreeable sight of the divine perfections; for the veil of human flesh concealed their terrible glory; and man could see them and live, when he saw them through a glass darkly; but even then all his goodness passed before us, for it broke through the veil, and could not be hid. His power seemed to be changed into the weakness of an infant, and disdained not to be *wrapt in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger.* It submitted to hunger and thirst, to cold and nakedness; and forbore to exert itself, while *the soul of our Redeemer was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death, and his body sweated, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground.* It bore the cross with patience and resignation, and was numbered with the transgressors for the sins of his people. But it was not altogether concealed, during his abode upon earth: it appeared but only in acts of mercy and compassion, *not to destroy men's lives, but to save them.* *Jesus of Nazareth was anointed with the holy Ghost and with power; and he went about doing good, giving sight to the blind, feet to the lame, ears to the deaf, health to the sick, and life to the dead.* (Acts, x. 38.) And in his last hour, though it did not manifest itself in his rescue, yet it supported him with such measures of strength, as enabled him to bear the weight of our sins, and rendered his sufferings effectual to our salvation.

His wisdom also was revealed but imperfectly, and opened itself by degrees; while the holy Jesus was a tender infant, it complied with the infirmities of a rational soul, and waited till the dawning of human reason; and he that was perfectly wise from all eternity, did yet represent himself, as *increasing in wisdom, as well as stature:* he was distinguished indeed by his extraordinary endowments, when he was but twelve years old; but yet it is marvellous, that he should lay so long concealed: *they that heard him disputing with the doctors, were astonished at his understanding and answers* (Luke, ii.); but they would have been struck with greater astonishment, had he not restrained his wisdom, but suffered it to shine forth in its full strength.

When he entered upon the public exercise of his ministry, he mercifully considered, that his followers were only children

dren in understanding. And though the great truths, which he brought down from heaven, were worthy of God, and could be revealed only by him, yet he adapted them to the capacities of men, and regarded the weakness of the receivers, more than the majesty of the giver.

He sometimes spoke in parables, because they had not ears to hear them more plainly delivered. And at other times he taught in the most familiar manner, and stooped to the meanest understandings, that the most ignorant of the people might be made wise unto salvation. And his justice, that awful perfection, did as it were suspend itself, and wait with patience and forbearance, hoping for their amendment, until they had wearied mercy itself, and it could no longer refrain from punishing.

The most remarkable instance of justice was shewn upon the cross; but even there it was clothed with goodness: it gave satisfaction to itself, by executing vengeance upon the well-beloved Son of God, and punishing our sins in that divine person, that took them upon him. While justice appeared in the punishment of one, mercy rejoiced in the salvation of the whole world.

And this goodness dwelt among us, and vouchsafed us almost a bodily presence, from the time that he left the bosom of the father, till he returned to him, to reign in the fulness of glory. This perfection was *that which his disciples heard, which they saw with their eyes, which they looked upon, which they handled with their hands* (1 John, i. 1.).

Having inquired into the reasons, for which God might be supposed to shew only his goodness to Moses, I proceed,

Secondly, To inquire in what sense it might pass before him.

But I am discouraged at the attempt. For, who is sufficient for it? For the Almighty did not only promise to display a portion of it, but all his goodness; and this is so extensive an object, that the eye of man is not large enough to behold it; and since our faculties are bounded and confined, how can they form an idea of an unlimited perfection? Though we could see it clearly, as far as our eye can reach, yet there would be a vast compass, and even a world of goodness, beyond the reach of our eye; and when God

manifests it all, we can know it but in part. In heaven itself, it cannot be entirely presented to us at one view, but as our capacities are opened wider, it will give us a larger sight of itself; and when we have enjoyed ages of happiness, fresh discoveries will still remain to be made; the more we know of it, so much the more we shall find is still to be known; and the utmost we shall learn from our highest attainments will be, that our prospect will encrease to all eternity.

We must therefore lessen it, before we can take any measure of it, and speak only of some particular instances of the divine goodness, if we speak at all.

We may then suppose, that the goodness which passed before Moses, consisted chiefly of his merciful dispensations to his peculiar people, and the future blessings that he intended to bestow upon them. Moses had just interceded for the children of Israel, and stood in the gap, when the divine displeasure was ready to break forth against them. And so tender was his compassion towards them, that like the Son of God, he would have taken their misery upon himself, and been *blotted out of the book of God* (Ex. xxxii. 32.), that their sin might be forgiven. It is therefore probable, that God might display the riches of his goodness towards the people whom Moses loved with so ardent an affection, and might unfold the gracious counsels of his providence.

He might shew him their wonderful success under Joshua, first in passing over the river Jordan, *when the waters which came down from above stood, and rose up upon an heap, and those that came down towards the sea failed, and were cut off* (Josh. iii. 16.). He might then present to him *the walls of Jericho, that fell down at the sound of the trumpets* (Josh. vi. 20.); and *the slaughter of the five kings that fought against Gibeon, while the sun and moon stood still, till the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies* (Josh. x. 13.).

He might give him a prospect of their victory over Sisera, *captain of the host of Jabin, when the stars in their courses fought against Sisera; and he bowed, he fell, he lay down, slain by the hand of a woman* (Judges, v.).

He might describe their increasing happiness, under Samuel and David, and Solomon, and make him joyful and glad

of heart, for all the goodness that he would do for these his servants and for Israel his people.

He might draw the glory of his temple, and the beauty that adorned the habitation of his holiness, to which David and the chief of the fathers, and the princes of the tribes, offered willingly with a perfect heart (Chron. xxix.), and which Solomon filled with the various riches of distant nations.

He might represent Jerusalem sitting as queen of the nations, and princess among the provinces, when the mighty came from far, to behold and reverence her greatness.

He might shew him his arm stretched out to save the city, when the prayer of Hezekiah came before him; and his angel went forth to destroy an hundred and fourscore and five thousand of its enemies (Isa. xxxvii. 36.).

He might offer to his view the good Josiah, putting away the corruptions of the nation, and in the midst of the ungodly, asserting the honour of God. He might set in array before him the glorious company of the prophets, which came from time to time intreating a sinful nation to accept the overtures of mercy.

And at length he might fill him with an extasy of joy and admiration, at the expedient of sending his only Son to take our nature upon him, and bringing forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, to save the Gentiles, and his people Israel (Isa. xi. 1.). He might open his eyes to behold the host of angels that attended his birth, that ministered to him after his temptation, that proclaimed his resurrection.

He might spread before him the poverty and meanness into which he was born, and in which he lived, and the shame and misery in which he died, together with the instances of his mercy, from the manger to the cross.

He might appear arising upon his church, and shedding his glory upon it, and Moses might see the Gentiles coming to his light, and kings to the brightness of his rising (Isa. lx. 3.).

He might also display the conflicts of the church militant, and describe her passing through the furnace, and coming forth like fine gold. And he might take down the partition between this world and the other, shew him a heavenly, as well as an earthly Canaan, and transport

him with the sight of multitudes of every nation and language, coming to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God (Matt. viii. 11.).

Thus might his goodness pass before Moses; but still we speak but uncertainly; it is enough for us to make some slight conjecture, and draw a faint resemblance of it. I proceed,

Thirdly, To inquire what use we should make of this gracious dispensation.

And, first, since God delights to manifest his goodness, it should encourage us to serve and please him. Goodness is the strongest obligation, and the most persuasive inducement to the discharge of our duty: it has a mighty influence over every generous, ingenuous spirit, and carries them forth into action with a lively zeal; and it leaves the disobedient without excuse, and brings the heavy charge of perverseness upon them. It must be an incurable hardness of heart, that cannot be melted with goodness; and a fatal stubbornness, that will not be drawn by the cords of love. It is an unspeakable pleasure to follow the Captain of our Salvation, who has strewed mercies in the way, and made the path of our duty, a shining light. And though we pass through the wilderness, or the sea, we need not be afraid, for he is our pillar to defend, and our guide to lead us. And if we look towards his goodness, that passes before us, we shall not regard the evils of this world, having so delightful an object always in our view.

It will go before us like the star, that went before the wise men, till it came and stood where the young Child, Jesus, was (Matt. ii. 9.); and when we are arrived at the haven, where we would be, it will enlarge our souls, that they may receive the fulness of bliss, and will give us the eternal enjoyment of itself.

Secondly, and lastly, Since the goodness of God has come down to visit us, and made its abode with us, we should chiefly endeavour to imitate this perfection; it has offered itself, even to our strictest survey, and stood before us that we might take a draught of it. It has not appeared only for a short time, like the transient flashes of lightning, but visited us continually, like the sun that rules the day; from morning to evening it has performed its usual course, and

been present with us in the watches of the night.

Let us not, therefore, value ourselves, for the extent of our power, the improvements of our knowledge, or wisdom; nor think too highly of our attainments in holiness; but whatsoever our endowments are, let them exercise and adorn themselves with goodness. Let the measure of our power be filled with this amiable virtue: and let us esteem it our glory, to protect the weak, to support the injured, to relieve the poor, and to be like God in doing good to men.

S E R M O N XIV.

The Repentance of Nineveh.

[Preached at Beeding, in Suffex, on the fast-day for the plague, 1721.]

JONAH, iii. 5, 6.

the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them, even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

THE exemplary humiliation and repentance of the men of Nineveh (Luke, xi. 32.) was mentioned by our Saviour, to upbraid the Jews, and condemn the stubborn infidelity of that perverse generation.

And it is also recorded for our admonition, and equally serves to bear testimony against us, upon whom the ends of the world are come (1 Cor. x. 11.)

The wickedness of the men of Nineveh came up before God, and the violence that was in their hands cried so mightily (Jonah, i. 2.) for vengeance, that the Almighty was constrained to denounce speedy destruction against that great city, and to send his prophet Jonah with that dreadful message, *Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.* (Jonah, iii. 4.)

Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days journey, and Jonah had began to enter into the city a day's journey, when the people regarded the terrible warning, and believed God. (Jonah, iii. 3, 4, 5.)

The prophet had not reached to the king's court, but word came to him: and, by the decree of the king and his nobles, an universal fast was immediately proclaimed; and every order of men joined in the

humiliation, laying aside the pomp of greatness, and putting on the garb of sinners, covering themselves with sackcloth, and sitting in ashes. (Jonah, iii. 6, 7.)

And as their sins had brought them down to a level with the beasts that perish, so they made no distinction between themselves and the beasts: for the decree extended to both; *Let neither man nor beast, herd or flock, taste any thing; let them not feed, nor drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell, if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?* (Jonah, iii. 7, 8, 9.)

This was the proper language and behaviour of sincere penitents. These were fruits meet for repentance. And he that discerns the secrets of the heart, discerned the sincerity of their humiliation, and repented of the evil that he had said, that he would do unto them, and he did it not (Ver. 10.).

So remarkable a case, that it was thought worthy of observation by the eternal Son of God, is certainly worthy to be strictly observed, and deeply considered by us. I shall therefore consider,

First, The repentance of Nineveh, with all the circumstances of it. And,

Secondly, The happy effect that was wrought by it. And,

Thirdly, Shall make an application of both, to the occasion and design of this day's solemnity.

And, first, I shall consider the repentance of Nineveh, with all the circumstances of it. We may justly conclude, that the inhabitants had filled up the measure of iniquity, and were ripe for vengeance, since the God that is slow to anger had pronounced the sentence of swift destruction, and contracted the time of forbearance into the narrow space of forty days.

A people so heavily laden with wickedness, and so peremptorily doomed to perdition, must necessarily have sinned themselves into a state of gross stupidity, and hardness of heart.

The sacred history assures us, that there were more than sixscore thousand persons, that could not discern between their right hand and their left (Jonah, iv. 11.).

And their own confession charges

ins of violence upon them; sins that express an open defiance of God, and strive for mastery with the Almighty.

Yet this wicked city, covered with the darkness of heathenism, and lying in the depths of iniquity, awakes and stirs up itself at the preaching of the prophet, and shakes off its brutish stupidity, by an active and lively faith in the true God.

It was rather to be feared, that ignorance and impiety combined together, would have set at nought all the counsels of Jonah, and rejected the unwelcome preacher with those words of disdain, *What does this babbler say?*

This is generally the case, when *Wisdom crieth without, and uttereth her voice in the streets. She calls, but abandoned sinners refuse to hearken to her voice: She stretcheth out her hand, and no man regards her. The scornful still delight in their scorn, and fools hate knowledge* (Prov. i. 20. 22. 24.).

So fond are they of making a mock at sin, that they laugh at their own calamity, and mock when their destruction cometh, when destruction cometh as a whirlwind: when distress and anguish cometh upon them.

Thus it was in the days of Noah, when the long-suffering of God waited an hundred and twenty years, while the ark was preparing (1 Pet. iii. 20.).

The preacher of righteousness was a proverb of reproach, and his words seemed to be as idle tales. And though his continuing to build the ark was a declaration of his firm belief of the determinate counsel of God, yet the sinful world regarded not the daily admonition, but vainly thought, that their houses should continue for ever, and their dwelling-places should endure from one generation to another. Presumptuous pride and luxury blinded their wretched souls, till the flood came as a thief in the night, and swept away the world of the ungodly (2 Pet. ii. 5.).

And thus also it will be, or rather thus it is, in the last days. For the time is already come, when the ministers of God are had in derision, for delivering the holy oracles; and the terrors of the Lord are profanely ridiculed, as the dreams or delusions of men.

But it was not thus with the inhabitants of Nineveh. While the prophet was as yet in the outward parts of the city, the sound of his preaching was carried into every quarter; and the repent-

ance of the people was as general as their sin. The alarm ran through the city, like the sparks among the dry stubble. Fear surprized the houses of the mighty, and word came to the king. *The king's heart was changed in him, and his lords were astonished.* The example of repentance began at the throne, and descended with a mighty influence upon the people.

As the power of the king could not exempt or secure him from the stroke of vengeance; so it did not render him forgetful of the common danger, or flatter him with presumptuous hopes of safety. But he arose from his throne, and laid his robe from him.

Behold, a truly glorious spectacle! An example worthy of imitation! A spectacle more glorious than all the appearances of majesty, and the stately ensigns of power! He does not think that a throne is a proper seat for a sinner devoted to destruction; or that a robe can cover the shame and pollution of sin. But he falls to the ground, from whence even princes are taken, and sits in ashes, to which the mightiest of men must return. He is clothed in sackcloth, instead of wearing the soft raiment, that is in king's houses; and abstains from ordinary food and refreshment, instead of *sarving delicately every day.*

And how contemptible soever he might appear in the eyes of profane wicked men, he was more highly exalted by debasing himself; and was infinitely more precious in the sight of God than the haughty Jezebel that painted her face, and tyred her head (2 Kings, ix. 30.), and met the minister of vengeance with taunting reproaches.

Even in dust and ashes, and sackcloth, he was more nobly adorned than Herod was in his royal apparel. And how loathsome and despicable a figure the king and his nobles might seemingly make, in the time of their humiliation, yet even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

The robes of innocence are more beautiful than vestures of gold; and when these are unhappily lost, happy are they that clothe themselves with humility, and put on the garments of repentance.

This was the behaviour of Theodosius the Great, when he first entered the church, after he had been for some time excluded by St. Ambrose.

He thought himself unworthy to stand in the presence of God, unworthy even to

kneel before him; and fell prostrate with his face to the ground, using those words of the Psalmist, *My soul cleaveth to the dust, O quicken thou me according to thy word.*

With the same humility, Constantine, the first Christian emperor, ordered his image to be stamped on his golden medals, representing him in the posture of a suppliant, looking up to heaven with his arms stretched forth to God.

And after the pattern of the king of Nineveh, the kings and emperors in the primitive times laid aside their crowns and arms, and guards, when they entered into the house of the King of kings; and their penitential devotions were a better ornament, and a stronger defence, than crowns, or arms, or guards.

At the highest pitch of greatness, there is no just occasion for pride: there is too much reason for humility. *Why is earth and ashes proud? for he that is to-day a king, to-morrow shall die. Trouble and uneasiness pursueth every man, from him that sitteth on a throne of glory, to him that is humbled in earth and ashes.* The changes and chances of human life are the seeds of anxiety and fear, to the greatest of princes. Perplexing thoughts enter into their inward chambers, and compass about their beds by night. *A little or nothing is their rest: in their sleep they are as in the day of keeping watch, troubled in the visions of their hearts, as if they were escaped out of the battle. When all is safe they awake, and marvel that the fear was nothing* (Ecclus. xl. 6, 7.).

But were there no uncertainty in their state, yet their honour fades with their life, and is but a gilded vapour, passing away like the beautiful colours of the rainbow.

But why should I speak of the shortness of life, since the duration of the world is but as a few days? The longest part of it, is but as yesterday, which seemed to be as nothing, in its fleeting passage, and is now no more. And that which we so much expect and hope for, even to-morrow, will pass as swiftly by, to be swallowed up in endless night to the wicked, but in everlasting day to the righteous.

What then are all the ornaments and show of this world, since *the world itself shall wax old like a garment, and be folded up like a vesture* (Heb. i. 11, 12.)?

That glorious light that *rules the day, shall be turned into darkness*, and the beauty

of heaven shall become *black as sackcloth of hair* (Rev. vi. 12.).

But there are yet more forcible reasons for humility, even the infinite numbers of our sins.

For these the ways of Nineveh mourned, and all her gates were full of sorrow and confusion. As every one had contributed his share of wickedness, to aggravate the account, and make up the dreadful sum, so every one *humbled himself under the mighty hand of God*, and wept much that much might be forgiven. *All, from the greatest of them even to the least, put on sackcloth*, the habit of shame, and guilt, and misery. The distinctions of birth and fortune were cancelled by their sins, and forgotten at the near approaches of their punishment. And it was necessary that these distinctions should cease, when they appeared before an angry God: for they will be utterly abolished in *the great and terrible day of the Lord*. The people of every age and nation shall stand upon the same spacious theatre, all equally exposed to the all-seeing eye and impartial judgment of God. *There will be no respect of persons with him*, but he will put all *principality, and power, and might, and dominion, under his feet*.

And no distinction ought to be made, even in this life, when we come to consider ourselves as sinful creatures: for sin debases every one that commits it, and brings down the multitude of its servants to the same inglorious level.

Whatsoever talents are given us by our Creator, whether they are the gifts of body, or mind, the advantages of wealth, or power, or honour; yet our sins cast us down into the lowest sink of infamy and disgrace. And those that obey their vices, notwithstanding their outward appearances of state, and promising shows of happiness, are yet but slaves bound hand and foot in the most ignominious bondage and slavery. Shame and contempt is due to every sinner, *from the first-born of Pharaoh, that sits on the throne, unto the first-born of the captive that is in the dungeon*. And a guilty nation should humbly confess their wretchedness in the words of Daniel, *O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee* (Dan. ix. 8.).

When the glories of the world arise before them, and they fondly admire the

vain show that covers them; let them open those painted sepulchres, their breasts, and behold (if they can bear to behold) them full of all uncleanness.

This loathsome view must constrain them to abhor the pageantry that deceived them; and the flattering occasion of their pride, must be turned into just reasons for humility.

It was this sense of things that possessed the hearts of the men of Nineveh, when the whole city mourned in sackcloth, and fasted in ashes. Nor did their humiliation stop here, but they proceeded to execute a holy revenge upon themselves and their vices, by a strict abstinence from their daily food and refreshment.

This plainly expressed the firmness of their resolution, to use a pious importunity with God, and never to enjoy even the necessary supports of life, till they had prevailed for pardon.

This was the best expedient to bring them to an entire sense of their duty, and a lively remembrance of God. And this also was a punishment suitable to their sins of violence and oppression, the deepest blots in their infamous character.

When the instruments of vengeance are prepared, and the sword of destruction hangs over a wicked people, it is not a time to enjoy the good things of the world, or even to hearken to the common demands of nature.

It should be almost their only meat and drink to do the will of God, if there is yet an opportunity of doing it. They should cleave incessantly to the throne of grace, if they are yet permitted to kneel before it.

The prophet Daniel was performing the duties of fasting and supplication, when the Most High sent down his angel to comfort him. And God delights to forgive his sinful creatures, when they depart not from the temple, but serve him with fastings and prayers, night and day (Luke, ii. 37.).

Fasting is an acceptable service to God, because it crucifies those filthy lusts that fight against him; and cleansing the soul from sensual impurities, presents it through the blood of Christ, a pure and holy sacrifice to God.

When the body is gratified to the full, the soul is pressed down to the earth, and hindered from rising to God that gave it.

But self-denial takes off the clog that oppresses it, and suffers it to regard its higher concerns, and ascend with its natural force towards heaven. The soul being withdrawn from the objects of sense, has leisure to recover itself by reflection, and return to the practice of virtue.

The wanton prodigal thinks not of his father's house, whilst his substance answers his riotous living: but as soon as he is pinched with want, *He says with himself, how many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, while I perish with hunger?* His depraved inclination tempted him to take a journey into a far country: but the sense of misery and distress forced him to arise and go to his father (Luke, xv.).

The sons of Jacob remembered not the affliction of Joseph, till famine and imprisonment pressed them sore: then they felt the anguish of his soul (Gen. xlii. 21.), and were grieved with the thoughts of their unnatural cruelty to their brother.

And that severe abstinence, which the men of Nineveh inflicted upon themselves, was a proper punishment for the violence that was in their hands.

It was but just that the oppressors should want the staff of bread, and the refreshment of water, since they had taken away the sheaf from the hungry, and compelled the needy to tread the wine-presses, and suffer thirst (Job, xxiv. 11, 12.).

It was but just that their bowels should labour with griping pain, since they had no compassion for the afflicted.

It was but just that they should wait long for their necessary sustenance, and deny their eagerly-craving appetite, since they had withheld the poor from their desire, and caused the eyes of the widow to fail (Job, xxxi. 16.).

Their oppression cried aloud for revenge, and they avenged the cause of the poor, and punished themselves, who were the instruments of cruelty.

Therefore they turned their feasts into mourning, and all their songs into lamentations, and put on sackcloth upon all their loins. The land trembled for their iniquities, and the mourning of every one that dwelt therein, was as the mourning of an only son.

Nor did they only grieve for their evil ways, but effectually turned from them, and renounced their vices.

This was the intent of their humiliation; and without this it had been fruitless and vain. Fasting and sackcloth, and ashes, are but the symbols and tokens of repentance. And God will not be mocked with empty pretences, that pass away like a shadow. There may be sinful pride even in the profession of humility: and the dress of mourning may be as vain pageantry as the pomp of a triumph.

But God, who saw the king of Nineveh arise from his throne, saw him also forsake the seat of violence. And therefore He turned away from his fierce anger, because every one, from the greatest even to the least, sincerely turned from his evil way. Which brings me,

Secondly, To consider the happy effect that was wrought by their repentance.

A great and wonderful effect! that the prayers and supplications of sinful dust and ashes should prevail for mercy with an offended God, and move him to reverse the dreadful sentence of justice!

The prophet Jonah was apprehensive of this change, and was unwilling to foretell their swift destruction, *knowing that the Lord was a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Therefore he fled from the presence of the Lord* (Jonah, iv. 2.), that he might not deliver a message that might be contradicted by the event.

But let not God be charged with falsehood, for *He is not a man, that he should lie, or as the son of man, that he should repent.*

His threatenings of temporal evils proceed both from mercy and justice; and are but conditional in themselves, unless sinful men will make them absolute. It is mercy that pronounces the sentence; and justice that is forced to execute it.

While we are yet in a state of probation, we may avoid the punishments that are prepared for us: though the sword is drawn, yet God will withhold his hand, if we turn to him that is going to smite us.

But when the accepted time is past away, and the day of grace is come to an end, we shall be reclaimed no more; God will be no more intreated. The sentence that dooms the impenitent to eternal misery, is as unchangeable as the nature of God, and stands fast for ever and ever. But temporal punishments are suspended or removed, when the occasion of them is taken away.

Though our future obedience cannot atone for our past transgressions, yet God in his infinite mercy accepts of our sincere repentance, instead of perfect obedience: and when we repent of the evils that we have done, he also repents of the evil that he intended to do against us.

After he has spoken bitter things against a wicked people, and prepared them to expect lamentation, and mourning, and woe, he is yet unwilling to bring his judgments upon them; he yet waits for an opportunity of being gracious to them. And when he finds the tokens of their amendment, *he rejoices as one that findeth great spoils.*

When he sends forth the astonishing tidings of his judgments, he says, *Peradventure they may return to themselves, and their duty: it may be, they will yet be wise, and consider their latter end. I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord; wherefore turn yourselves and live* (Ezek. xviii. 32.).

The sentence passed upon David, for the matter of Uriah, was suitable to the heinous nature of his guilt: but as soon as he confessed, that *he had sinned against the Lord*, his pardon was sealed in heaven, and Nathan bid him be of good comfort, saying, *The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die* (2 Sam. xii. 13.).

There is an Advocate in heaven, always ready to plead for mercy; and the bowels of divine compassion yearn over us, whenever there is room for forgiveness. *For our heavenly Father knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are but dust* (Pl. ciii. 14.).

There is a remarkable instance of his tenderness towards his creatures, in the case of Nineveh. When Jonah had executed his commission, and foretold the near approaching ruin of that great city, he earnestly expected the accomplishment of his prophecy: and the prevention of it, by the repentance of the people, and the mercy of God, displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was very angry.

So impatient was he at the disappointment, that he expostulated with God, and desired him to *take away his life, thinking it better for him to die than to live.*

And he made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, indulging his grief and anger, till he might see what would become of the city.

And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and

made it come up over *Jonah*, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief: so *Jonah* was exceeding glad of the gourd.

But he was soon deprived of his pleasure; for God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day; and it smote the gourd that it withered. Being bereaved of this delightful shade, the sun beat upon his head, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die.

His repeated complaints inclined the God of mercy to reason with him; *Dost thou well to be angry for the gourd?* and he presumed to abet and encourage the extravagance of his passion, and said, *I do well to be angry, even unto death.*

And the Almighty retorted his complaint upon him, and condescended to draw an argument from the example of the prophet, to justify his own tenderness and compassion: *Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow, which came up in a night, and perished in a night. And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons, that cannot discern between their right-hand and their left-hand, and also much cattle* (*Jonah, vi.*)?

We may thus interpret this forcible argument: "Thou takest pity on the gourd, which received neither its being, nor its nourishment, from thee; which grew up without thy knowledge or care, in the darkness of the night, and returned to corruption before the morning arose upon thee: it did not continue in one day, but was snatched from thy embraces, before thy affection could cleave to it: and yet thou mournest for it, as for a brother, or a friend, which is as thine own soul: and thou sufferest thy grief to increase, and thinkest thou hast abundant reason to be angry for thy loss. Have I therefore greater reason to shew my tender pity, to an innumerable multitude of creatures, that were fashioned by me in the womb, and upheld from the womb? Should I snatch them away in an instant, and devour them with sudden destruction? When I remember how short their time is, should I make them for nought, and deprive them even of their transitory being, and contract the space that is but a span long? Does not their number plead for compassion? and is not their ignorance some excuse for their sin? Why

should I make them yet more wretched? Dost thou complain that thy gourd had too short a duration, and perished as suddenly as it rose? and dost thou think that forty days are sufficient for so many thousands of my creatures?"

Thus does the Almighty vouchsafe to vindicate his proceedings, and turn the repining of the prophet into a plea for himself. *Lord, what is man*, that thou shouldst condescend to talk with him, and reason in defence of thy infinite mercies! When an act of pardon is granted by an earthly sovereign, his subjects are glad to embrace it implicitly, without a strict inquiry into the terms and conditions of it: it is enough that he is pleased to pardon them; and they are bound to be thankful for it. But the King of kings disdains not to bring forth his strong reasons for his merciful dealings with us; and stirs up our bowels, even to excuse (if I may so speak) the greatness of his compassion.

Having considered the repentance of Nineveh, and its happy effect, I proceed.

Thirdly, To make an application of both, to the occasion and design of this day's solemnity.

The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and behold a greater than Jonas is here (*Mat. xii. 41.*). The voice of God calls aloud for repentance; and the almighty revenger makes bare his arm, to pluck us out of the jaws of iniquity. His destroying angel preaches to a sinful world, and endeavours to check the progress of wickedness, saying, *It is enough, stay now thine hand.*

The hearts of the people of Nineveh were turned in a few days, like the rivers of waters: but our heavenly monitor has continued to set our danger before us, from the beginning of the year even to the end of the year. We are now assembled a second time to deprecate his judgments, and have daily more pressing reasons to cry mightily to God. The raging pestilence dwelt but in one city, or wandered no farther than the borders of it, when we first assembled to bewail our sin and danger. And great had been the slaughter, if it had dwelt only there, and that alone had been the habitation of death.

But the king of terrors having destroyed, till he had almost made an end, has

left that once flourishing city bereaved of inhabitants, and wasted with misery. And whilst she sits solitary, weeping sore in the night for the loss of her people, her devouring enemy enlarges his camp, and spreads desolation round about.

The time would fail me to speak of the amazing variety of wretchedness that covers whole cities and provinces. Swift is the progress of the contagion, and the communication of misery; *swifter than the chariots on the tops of the mountains, or the flaming fire that devoureth the stubble before it; the people are much pained, all faces gather blackness. It runs to and fro in the cities, and climbs up into the houses, and enters in at the windows like a thief.* The camp of Death is very great, and his conquests terrible. *He eats up the nations, and pierces them thorough with his arrows.*

Their tender infants are brought forth, out of the womb, to give up the ghost, and as soon as they begin to be, they are as if they had never been. *They flee away as a dream, and cannot be found, and are chased away as a vision of the night.* Their mother's breasts are full of death, and their food is as the poison of alps.

Their young men are cast on the bed of languishing, in the midst of their strength; and their mighty men go down in a moment to the grave.

The living are unable to relieve each other, and are constrained to deny the last offices of humanity to their departed friends; applying the words of our Saviour to their miserable condition, *Let the dead bury their dead.*

The diary of their afflictions must melt us into pity: and it cannot but extort compassion, even from the hardest hearts, to read over the daily increasing catalogue of the slain.

Their mighty fortresses languish, and the places of strength, from whence their fleets and armies used to issue forth, are become desolate.

The highways are unoccupied, the inhabitants cease: their traffic is avoided as death, and their merchandize is abhorred as a nursery of diseases.

And the wretched nation seems to say to her neighbouring countries, *Mark me and be astonished, and lay your hand upon your mouth.*

But it may be, we are hardened against

a sense of her misery, because she was once an enemy to our country, and is still an enemy to our religion.

We may therefore behold it in another view, and consider her misery, as if it were our own: a case too probable, and a consideration of so near a concern to us, that it ought not to be neglected.

It was the just fear of its dangerous approaches, and a compassionate sense of the calamities that would distress us, if the contagion should spread itself over us, which occasioned this day of humiliation, and is mentioned in the decree of the king and his nobles, as the reason that moved them to it.

And we are far from answering its design, unless we are deeply sensible of the greatness of the evils that hang over us, the heinousness of our guilt that calls for vengeance, and the infinite mercies of God that may yet pardon our guilt, and forbear to destroy us.

We have no grounds to presume, hardly any grounds for the slightest hopes; we can only speak in the humble and diffident language of the king of Nineveh, *Who can tell, if God will turn away from his fierce anger that we perish not?*

We have seen the pestilence come in upon a foreign land like a wide breaking in of waters. And we have seen it battle all the contrivances of policy, the inventions of art, and the efforts of power. And it still prevails and gathers violence; neither can art, nor policy, nor power, nor even the different temper of different seasons assuage its fury.

The wisdom of our counsellors, and the experience of physicians, have joined together, studying to prevent its invading us, or to check its malignant infection. But the humiliation of this day, is the wisest expedient; and, if God in his mercy will accept it, this alone may be effectual.

We cannot but greatly fear that heavy calamity, which may gradually approach, or be accidentally brought, or be justly inflicted upon us.

Our eyes may soon run down with tears, and our eyelids gush out with waters. The voice of wailing may be heard in our streets, and every one may teach his neighbour lamentation. Death may come up into our windows, and enter into our palaces, to call off the children from without, and the young men from the street. Even the carcases of

men may fall as dung upon the open field, and as the handful after the harvest-man, and none may gather them (Jer. ix.).

Consider this, ye careless ones, that dwell at ease, and regard not the approach of the evil day. Consider what will be our case, if the destroying angel should pitch his tents in any part of our land. The corrupted branch will be separated from the body, and deprived of necessary relief. Friendship and humanity will be unable to perform their comfortable offices; and the means of correspondence will be cut off. The houses of the sick will be shut up; and diseased families be confined in their loathsome prisons, beholding nothing but helpless misery. Parents will dread the sight of their beloved children; and filial piety will in vain endeavour to exert itself towards the dying parents. Heaps of dead will offend the aching eyes of the sick: and the corrupted carcases will poison the living bodies, that will hardly bear the stink of their own corruption. They that carry forth the dead, will fail under their burthen, and immediately want that needful office which they attempted to perform.

The art of the physician will be lost in fruitless searches for the cause of the distemper; and no natural remedy will avail, when it struggles with the vengeance of God.

Timely precautions will not prevent its progress; nor will the strictly guarded lines set bounds to the pestilence. Day by day it will spread like a gangrene; and every hour will make a fresh addition to the territories of death.

It therefore behoves us, as we value all that is dear to us, to turn from our wickedness without delay, lest God should cast upon us the furiousness of his wrath, anger, displeasure and trouble, and send evil angels amongst us. We cannot too deeply humble ourselves for the wretchedness of our guilt, before we are made more wretched by our punishment.

It highly concerns us to cast off the whole mass of our sinful corruption, and to renounce every vice that has gotten the dominion over us. But it more especially concerns us, to put away with abhorrence, our most flagrant sins, and provoking abominations.

It was murmuring against the Lord, and casting unjust reproaches upon his

ministers, that kindled the divine indignation against the Israelites; so that he would have consumed them in a moment, by the plague that was begun, had not his mercy interposed, and stood with Aaron between the living and the dead, to accept the incense offered by the priest, as an atonement for the people (Numb. xvi. 48.).

It was the lewdness of Israel that provoked the Lord to jealousy, when twenty and four thousand died of the plague (Numb. xxv.); and Phinehas put an end to the slaughter, by his zeal for God.

It was the presumption of David, in numbering the people, and glorying in the strength of eight hundred thousand valiant men, that brought the pestilence upon the land, and lessened that mighty number, by the destruction of seventy thousand men (2 Sam. xxiv.).

It was the vaunting pride, and insolent blasphemy of Senaccherib, that came up into the ears of the Almighty, when he sent forth his angel into the camp of the Assyrians, and smote an hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold they were all dead corpses. And those terrible armies, that dried up all the rivers of the besieged places, with the soles of their feet, were as the grass of the field; and as the green herb, as the grass on the house tops, and as corn blasted before it be grown up (Isaiah, xxxvii.).

And it was the oppression and violence of Nineveh, that hastened the doom of that bloody city, and brought its destruction near, even to its gates.

And may not these sins be equally charged upon us? does not our heart tremble? Is it not moved out of its place, at the mention of these transgressions? Is there not impious murmuring, profligate lewdness, haughty presumption, insolent blasphemy, and violent oppression, in our streets? Are not truth and simplicity departed, and innocence and integrity made a prey?

But there is yet a more dreadful example before us; a yet heavier charge against us.

Jerusalem was once the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth. But the Lord hath swallowed up all her habitations, and thrown down the strong holds of the daughter of Judah, because she rejected the Son of God, and crucified the Lord of glory. For this amazing wickedness she was betrayed by factions, and wasted by famine

famine within, and straitened and besieged without, and *the Romans took away both her place and nation. And the ways of Sion shall for ever mourn, her gates shall be for ever desolate.*

And yet in defiance of this dreadful admonition, we crucify the Son of God afresh, and deny the Lord that bought us. Even whilst we humble ourselves with fasting, there are many that glory in doing despite to the blessed Jesus, that fasted forty days and forty nights for our sakes. (Mat. iv.)

Whilst we desire to avert the consuming plague, there are many that cast reproaches upon him *that bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows, and healed all manner of sickness and diseases among the people.*

Whilst our danger constrains us to cry mightily to God, there are many that blaspheme our Redeemer, who prayed earnestly for our pardon, and *sweat as it were great drops of blood* under the burthen of our sins.

Whilst there is yet a space for repentance, there are many that depreciate those infinite merits, through which alone our repentance will be accepted.

While we are yet permitted to offer up our spiritual sacrifices, there are many that violate the excellent dignity of our eternal High-priest, *who gave himself a sacrifice for us.*

Let the sense of this crying sin, and all other abominations, fill us with unfeigned sorrow and humility.

Let us *hide ourselves in the dust together, and cover our faces with confusion.*

Let our king and our princes *cast down their crowns before the throne of God, and worship the Lamb that liveth for ever and ever. Let small and great stand in awe of him, and endeavour to avoid the fury of his wrath.*

Let us fly to the mercy-seat, while we may have access to it, and cleave steadfastly to the holy place, till we can obtain forgiveness.

Let us beseech the holy Jesus to wash us in his precious blood, and offer up the incense of our imperfect prayers.

Let us beseech him to look down with pity and compassion on our afflicted brethren, and *take away his plague from them, before they are consumed by the means of his heavy hand.*

Let their troubles be ever in our sight, and their calamities be considered as an earnest of our own.

And, let the united voices of the whole nation cry mightily to God, for his patience and forbearance.

Hear our prayers, O Lord, and with thine ears consider our calling; hold not thy peace at our tears. Lord, *what is our hope? truly our hope is even in thee. Father, if it be thy good pleasure, let this cup pass from us: nevertheless, not as we will, but as thou wilt.* But, O Lord most holy, O God most mighty, O holy and merciful Saviour, thou most worthy Judge eternal, suffer us not at our last hour for any pains of death to fall from thee: deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death.

SERMON XV.

Mary Magdalene.

LUKE, vii. 40, 41, 42, 43.

And Jesus answering, said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one ought him five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

OUR blessed Saviour came to seek and save those that were lost; and he eagerly embraced and wisely improved every opportunity of doing good to the souls of men. Whensoever he vouchsafed to converse with the Jews, or to accept of any invitation from them, he endeavoured to correct their mistaken judgments, and raise their minds to a just sense of spiritual things. And whilst he received a little bodily food or refreshment, he took occasion from thence, to feed them with the bread of life, and refresh them with the waters that flow for ever.

We may find several instances of this kind, in the sacred store-house of the gospel. Thus when he had called Matthew the publican from the receipt of custom, it came to pass, as he sat at meat in his house, that many other publicans and sinners came also with Jesus and his disciples: and

and the Pharisees, who pretended to the strictest purity and holiness, were offended at him, and said to his disciples, *How is it, that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?* And Jesus hearing their censorious remarks, returned this answer to them; *They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance* (Mark, ii. 15, 16, 17.).

Thus also when he visited Zaccheus, the chief of the publicans, and the precise Pharisees murmured, saying, *that he was gone to be guest with a man that was a sinner*; he regarded not their uncharitable reflections, but spake the words of comfort to Zaccheus, *This day salvation is come to this house. For the Son of Man is come to seek and save that which was lost* (Luke, xix. 7, 9, 10.).

And he never failed to express a compassionate tenderness towards the truly penitent soul; and never more fully expressed it, than in the remarkable case that is now before us. *For one of the Pharisees desired him, that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And behold a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him, weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him, saw it, he wondered that our Lord should suffer her to touch him; and began to draw a conclusion from it, injurious to our Saviour's honour; for he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who, and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him, for she is a sinner.*

Jesus, knowing what passed within the Pharisee's breast, immediately gave an effectual answer to his secret insinuation; and having a matter of great importance to propose to him, he bespoke his attention to it; *Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee*; and the Pharisee being prepared to hear, said, *Master, say on.* And then he stated the case plainly before him, and delivered a familiar parable, asking his judgment upon it. *There was a certain creditor had two debtors; the one ought five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And*

when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?

Simon having so fair a view of their different obligations, could not but make a right estimate, and give his immediate judgment upon them; and therefore he answered, and said, *I suppose that he to whom he forgave most.* This judgment was drawn from the common sense and experience of mankind, and was agreeable to the natural effect which benefits have upon the minds of men. And Jesus ratified and confirmed the sentence, saying, *Thou hast rightly judged* (Luke, vii.).

Thus was the Pharisee led unawares into a just approbation of the things that he had unjustly condemned. The parable was so plain, that it wanted no interpreter; it directed and applied itself; and unless the Pharisee were wilfully blind, he must necessarily see who was *the debtor that ought five hundred pence, and had nothing to pay*, and who was *the creditor that frankly forgave her all the debt*; and must also acknowledge, according to his own impartial judgment, that *she would love much, because much had been forgiven her.*

Our Saviour took off his thoughts from the multitude of sins that she had committed, and fixed them on that sincere and ardent love which covered a multitude of sins.

But lest the Pharisee should fail even yet to discern the full scope and design of the parable, Jesus proceeds to illustrate the case of the affectionate penitent. *And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she bath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss; but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. Mine head with oil thou didst not anoint; but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little* (Luke, vii. 44, 45, 46, 47.).

Thus did our Saviour display the several instances and expressions of her love to him, and draw a comparison in her behalf, to convince the Pharisee of the tenderness of her affection.

And after he had brought the parable home

home to her, he gave her the full assurance of hope, with those powerful words, *Thy sins are forgiven, thy faith hath saved thee, go in peace* (Luke, vii. 48. 50.).

And since these things were written for our learning, it behoves us to dwell some time longer upon the behaviour of this famous penitent, and to consider the intent of the parable, till we are thoroughly affected with it.

To this end I shall shew,

First, What was the name and character of this woman, and how much she loved, because much had been forgiven her.

Secondly, That we should remember how much has been forgiven us, that we also may love much. And,

Thirdly, That we should copy after the divine goodness, by forgiving much, that our enemies may love us much again.

And, first, I am to shew what was the name and character of this woman, and how much she loved, because much was forgiven her.

It is the opinion of learned men, that this person, so eminently distinguished in the gospel, was Mary Magdalene, once a wretched slave to sin, and taken captive by Satan, but afterwards rescued from his accursed dominion, and reconciled to God, by a perfect and unfeigned repentance.

When she came into the Pharisee's house, she was called *a woman that was a sinner*, which seemed to imply, that she had been notoriously sinful, and so infamously wicked, as to become a proverb of reproach for her wickedness; and therefore the Pharisee wondered greatly, that Christ should permit her to come near to him, and bear to be touched by one so much defiled with sin.

And we find in other parts of the gospel, that our Saviour had *cast seven devils out of her* (Mar. xvi. 9. Luk. viii. 2.); and we may justly suppose, that those unclean spirits had carried her into all manner of evil, and plunged her into the depth of iniquity.

But were there no other proof of her former wickedness, it would be sufficient that Christ has told us, *much was forgiven her*.

Great was his mercy in measuring her love by his own forgiveness. And since he was pleased to draw a veil over her sins,

it will not become us to uncover them any farther, or to inquire too particularly what were her crimes. Let them be as a dark cloud, while her future actions appear beautiful and glorious as a pillar of fire.

After her conversion, she was distinguished by St. Luke, as one of those devout and charitable women that accompanied our Saviour in his travels, and *ministered to him of their substance* (Mark, viii. 2, 3.)

And when Jesus entered into the house of Martha, as into the house of a friend, we may justly believe that it was the same *Mary that sat at his feet, and heard his word* (Luke, x. 39.). Behold the humble posture of an attentive disciple! So close was her attention, that she entirely neglected all other business; and her sister reproved her for that neglect. But our Lord gave her that honourable testimony, *Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her* (Ver. 42.).

Her modest and humble behaviour endeared her to Christ, and inclined him to make her partaker of his intimate friendship.

It was also, as we may reasonably suppose, *this Mary whose brother Lazarus was sick*. Therefore his sister sent unto Jesus, saying, *Lord, behold he whom thou lovest, is sick*. Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. And when Mary went forth to meet Jesus, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying, *Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died* (John, xi. 2, 3. 5. 32.). With so firm a faith did she believe in Christ! with such unshaken confidence did she rely on his compassion!

After the resurrection of Lazarus, Jesus was invited to a supper, at which Lazarus was present, whom he raised from the dead. And behold Mary Magdalene came in, and brought an *alabaster box of ointment*. Being desirous to make an offering to her Lord, she would not make it of that which did cost her nothing. For we learn from St. Matthew's gospel, that it was *very precious ointment*; and from St. John, that it was *ointment of spikenard, very costly* (Mat. xxvi. 7.—John, xii. 1, 2, 3.).

Having a deep sorrow and contrition for the number of her sins, she presumed not to appear before his face, but *stood at his feet, behind him, weeping, as if her head*

were waters, and her eyes a fountain of tears. And these tears that flowed from penitential sorrow, were also testimonies of her affection: for she began to wash his feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head; neither did her love stop here; she also kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment; and she poured it in such measure upon him, that the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.

Before she came into the house, we may imagine that she inquired after him, in the words of the church to Christ, *Tell me (O thou whom my soul loveth), where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon* (Song of Solomon, i. 7.)?

And when she is ministering to him, we may apply those other words of the church to this devout woman: *While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof* (Ver. 12.).

The Pharisee was surprized at our Saviour's accepting these offices from a woman that was a sinner: and Judas was moved with indignation, and said, to what purpose is this waste? Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? But Jesus received her with an affectionate welcome, and graciously esteemed these instances of her kindness, as if they were the last offices to her dying friend. For he said, *Let her alone, why trouble you her? She hath wrought a good work on me, she hath done what she could; she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.* And he did not reward her love with a transient commendation, but fixed and established it for ever. *Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done, shall be spoken of, for a memorial of her* (Mat. xxvi. Mar. xiv. Luk. vii. John, xii.).

And it stands recorded by each of the evangelists, and has been published in every nation under heaven. *Because of the savour of her good ointments, her name is as ointment poured forth* (Song of Solomon, i. 3.). Her fame is gone out into all lands, and her glory unto the ends of the world. And Mary Magdalene's love to our Saviour shall be delivered down from age to age in that sacred history, which will never be blotted out.

But we may still consider other expressions of her affection to him. She was one of those devout women that followed

him towards the place of his crucifixion, and bewailed and lamented him (Luke, xxiii. 27.).

She also stood by the cross of Jesus, with his mother, and fixed her weeping eyes upon him, partaking of those sorrows that pierced through the breasts that bare him, and the paps that gave him suck.

Neither tribulation, nor distress, nor persecution, nor peril, nor sword, could separate her from him. Her soul clave to him, even to his death; nay, it was stronger than the grave.

When Nicodemus prepared for the burial of his dead body, she followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid (Luke, xxiii. 55.).

And her love to him would hardly suffer her to give sleep to her eyes, nor slumber to her eyelids, till she had shewn her tenderest care of her departed Lord. For as soon as the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene came early, while it was yet dark, to the sepulchre, bringing sweet spices to anoint him. And when she saw the stone taken away from the door of the sepulchre, she complained to St. Peter, and to that disciple whom Jesus loved, and said unto them, *they have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.* (John, xxi. 2.).

Afterwards she stood at the sepulchre weeping; and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, and saw two angels in white, sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain: and they said unto her, *Woman, why weepest thou? She said unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.* And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. And Jesus said unto her, *Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, said unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.* Jesus, finding her still ignorant of him, said unto her, *Mary.* And she turned herself, and presently acknowledged him, saying, *Rabboni, which is, Master* (John, xx.).

Thus did her love continue from his death to his rising again; and he wiped away all tears from her eyes, by vouchsafing her his first appearance after his resurrection, and sending her to his disciples with the joyful news of his being risen from the dead,

How

How happy was this messenger that brought these good tidings, that gave this delightful assurance to his afflicted friends, Your Redeemer liveth!

How compassionate is Jesus, *who did not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, but bound up this broken-hearted sinner, and comforted her that mourned, and gave her beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness* (Isa. lxi. 1. 3.).

The example of this famous penitent, should, as I am,

Secondly, to shew, Teach us to remember how much has been forgiven us, that we also may love much.

The goodness of God, in giving his blessings to mankind, requires a large return of gratitude from us; and we should find our debt of love increasing to a prodigious sum, were we only to consider the gifts which his bounty daily sheds upon us.

But there is also forgiveness with thee, O God, therefore shalt thou be more abundantly loved. This doubles all other blessings, and gives us, ourselves, our souls and bodies, which were forfeited and lost, by the multitude of our sins.

Alas! the best of us fall seven times a day, and too many of us have fallen so often into wickedness, that we justly deserve to be branded and distinguished by the infamous character of sinners; and were our love to rise in proportion to the measure of our sins, which God vouchsafes to forgive, none of us could love him little, for the most perfect amongst us are forgiven much.

If we look back to a few of the days that are past, we shall see our account charged with a heavy burden of sins: every addition to our life has been attended with an addition to our guilt; and more than sufficient to every day has been the evil thereof. How then can we number the transgressions of our whole life, or make an estimate of the long arrears of trespasses, that are thrown together in confused heaps?

It is difficult to bear a transient view of them: it is hardly possible to survey the odious malignity of every vice, and the loathsome shame of our vile abominations. The uneasy reflection upon them covers us with confusion of face, and we are not able to look up, because our wickednesses are gone over our head, and are like a fore

burthen, too heavy for us to bear (Psal. xxxviii. 4.).

But though we abhor the sight of ourselves, and cannot endure the thoughts of our uncleanness, yet our offended God stretches out his arms to embrace us, and is ready to wash us thoroughly from our iniquities, and cleanse us from our sins (Ps. li. 2.).

There is a fountain opened to purge us from sin, and from uncleanness (Zech. xiii. 1.), even the fountain of our Saviour's precious blood.

And we may behold an emblem of the kind offices which he delights to perform to us, in his behaviour towards his disciples. *He rose from supper, and laid aside his garments, and took a towel, and girded himself. After that, he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples feet, and wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded* (John, xiii. 4, 5.).

Thus the Lord of glory condescends to minister to us also, that though our sins be as scarlet, they may be as white as snow, though they are red as crimson, they may be as wool (Isa. i. 18.).

The abatement of a debt is a welcome instance of kindness. And the unjust steward rightly judged, that he should bespeak the love and favour of his Lord's debtors, by lessening their charge, and bidding one of them take his bill, and write down fifty, instead of an hundred measures of oil, and another to write down fourscore instead of an hundred measures of wheat (Luk. xvi.). Surely, therefore, our Lord has the strongest claim to our love, since he has not only abated a part of our debt, but frankly forgiven it all.

Great had his mercy been, had he forborn to impute our sins to us, or place them to our account. And it is infinitely greater, as he transferred it from us, and placed it to his own account. He became a debtor in our stead, and, in order to procure a general discharge for us, he made an infinite satisfaction to his father's justice.

Behold our Redeemer upon the cross, cancelling the hand-writing that was against us, and comforting Mary Magdalene, and all other true penitents, with those important words, *It is finished!* Can we ever forget such an obligation as this? Can we delay to shew our gratitude, when all the return that is required of us is love? Will not such amazing kindness draw tears out of our rocky hearts, and

cause

cause waters to gush out like rivers? The sense of our multiplied offences against so good a God, should make us sit upon the ground, and keep silence; our eyes should fail with tears, and our bowels should be troubled at the remembrance of our baseness.

The mournful dress of the affectionate penitent is more amiable in the sight of God than ornaments of gold; and he delights to clothe us with robes of glory, when we are truly sensible of our nakedness and shame.

Thus when the prodigal son was disposed to arise and go to his father, and thought himself unworthy to be called his son, and humbly desired to be as one of his hired servants; the compassionate father could not refrain himself from going forth to meet him, but when he was yet a great way off, he ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him; and when his penitent son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; the father immediately said unto his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat, and be merry. And as the father rejoiced with double joy, because his son had been dead, and was alive again, had been lost, and was found (Luke, xv.); so his son could not but love him with double affection; because he became, as it were, a second time his father, and begot him again, by calling him again his son.

The mention of this glorious instance leads me,

Thirdly, to shew, That we should copy after the divine goodness, by forgiving much, that our enemies may love us much again.

We have seen the mercy of our Saviour proposed to us for our imitation; but lest that great example should seem too high for our reach, it has been brought nearer to us, under the familiar instance of a creditor forgiving his debtor. And the case proposed to the Pharisee was so plain and obvious to his reason, that he immediately gave judgment agreeable to it; and by giving it immediately, he shewed that it was the natural result of his thoughts, and flowed from the common sense and opinion of mankind; and therefore we may justly conclude, that as long as gratitude remains in the world, the forgiveness of

great and heinous injuries will procure a return of love, in proportion to the measure of our forgiveness. And the Pharisee's ready answer, not only shews that it is possible, but also that it is highly probable it should produce this effect. And this judgment of man is of the greater weight, because it was ratified by the judgment of God.

Our Saviour rejoiced to overcome evil with good, and the greater the evil was, so much the more he delighted in the conquest: with what pleasure did he speak of Mary Magdalene! How particularly did he mention, how largely did he illustrate every testimony of her affection! He remembered the greatness of her sins, only that he might shew the greatness of her repentance, and loved to set the penitent in opposition to the sinner. No one had been more at enmity with him; no one was honoured more with his friendship.

Methinks our ambition should move us to imitate this example; and we should be quite transported with the thoughts of changing an inveterate enemy into a faithful friend. Perhaps his offences are many; so much the more he stands in need of forgiveness. And the more we forgive him, so much the more he may love us, in return for so large a measure of forgiveness. *Thus shall we heap coals of fire upon his head* (Rom. xii. 20.), and melt him into unfeigned sorrow for his past offences.

And the hopes of this success are enough to enliven our endeavours, and make us unwearied in doing good, that we may at length obtain an entire conquest of evil.

How partially soever we magnify the injuries we have received, and how much soever we labour to add to their aggravations, yet the intent of the parable will still reach our case, and we can never find a sufficient objection against forgiveness.

If any sufficient objection could have been found, the father must have found it against embracing his prodigal son: for he had received a large portion from him; and having cast off the affection that is natural to children, he had entirely left his father's house, gone into a far country, wasted his substance by lewd and riotous living (Luke, xv.), and debased himself into a mean and servile condition; yet the tender father over-

rules all these objections, as soon as his son is willing to return; and thinks with himself, that the pardoned prodigal will love him with the strongest affection, and be for ever endeared to him, by remembering how much has been forgiven him.

What a glorious spectacle is the man that is equally ready to give up all his prejudices, and gladly removes every let and hindrance that may prevent a reconciliation!

We have a remarkable instance of this kind, in Joseph's behaviour towards his brethren: When they could not answer him, at his first discovery of himself, being troubled at his presence, he spoke kindly to them, *Come near to me, I pray you, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you, to preserve life; so now it was not you that sent me hither, but God* (Gen. xlv.).

How charitably did he cover their faults! how gladly did he find excuses to lessen their injuries! how mildly did he talk with them to abate their fears! and when he had encouraged them to approach towards him, how affectionately did he kiss all his brethren! With what transports of joy did he weep over them! When the fame thereof was heard in Pharaoh's house, how well did it please Pharaoh and all his servants! and how pleasant must it be to be witnesses of such a reconciliation! how much more pleasant to be reconciled to our offending brother, and vanquish our enemy by the embraces of a friend!

That we may compose ourselves into this forgiving temper, let us deeply consider the multitude of our sins against God. O how great is the sum of them! Let us endeavour to remember, how often, how perversely, how ungratefully we have offended him. And, let us fill our hearts with sorrow, for having made so unnatural a return to our best friend.

When our hearts are humbled with this afflicting consideration, and softened into an affectionate tenderness, they will be fit to receive the impressions of mercy, and will relent, and yield to our penitent brother.

Let us suppose ourselves to be in St. Peter's place, weeping bitterly for the repeated denial of Jesus: let us behold our Lord reproving us only with a look,

and forgiving our fault as soon as he has put us in mind of it. And when we have thought of so much goodness, we shall have no occasion to ask St. Peter's question, *Lord how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?* But shall readily return our Saviour's answer to it; *Not unto seven times, but unto seventy times seven* (Matth. xviii. 21, 22.).

The blessed Jesus never fails to forgive us upon our repentance; and therefore he justly requires us to forgive our brother as often as he repents. *If thy brother (says he) trespass against thee rebuke him, and if he repent, forgive him; and if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him* (Luke, xvii. 3, 4.).

Seventy times seven is a large number; but our forgiveness is not confined even to that number; it serves rather to shew that it ought to be unlimited, and confined to no number at all.

Wretched, irrecoverably wretched would be our case, if God were to forgive us but seventy times seven times, and his mercy should say, Hitherto will I come, and no farther.

Let us think with ourselves how earnestly we desire pardon, with what fear and anguish of soul we cry unto him, *Cast us not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy spirit from us. O give us the comfort of thy help again, and establish us with thy free spirit* (Psal. li. 11, 12.).

Let us consider that he does not spurn at, nor disdainfully reject us; but kindly embraces the humble penitents, *pours oil into their wounds, and binds up all their sores*. With what pity does he raise them up from the dust! how graciously does he comfort and refresh their drooping souls! With what tenderness does he assuage their sorrows, *Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you!* How freely does he invite us all, *Come unto me, all that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!*

How affectionately does he receive us at his table! and how great is his joy, when we sincerely partake of his body and blood!

May we learn to love our brother as our Saviour loves us! may we strive to forgive much, since we are forgiven infinitely more!

S E R M O N XVI.

God the Author and Giver of all
our Faculties.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, at St.
Mary's.]

EXOD. iv. 11.

And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the Lord?

GOD hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are (1 Cor. i. 27, 28.). For the strength of God is made perfect in the weakness of man, and the infirmities of our nature shew forth the power of Christ (2 Cor. xii. 9.).

This was confirmed by a wonderful instance, when the all-wise and almighty God was pleased to make choice of Moses, to be his ambassador to the court of Pharaoh, and the deliverer of his people Israel, from Egyptian bondage. He chose Moses his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds, from following the ewes great with young, he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance (Psalm lxxviii. 71, 72.).

The good shepherd, greatly surprized with the unexpected charge, modestly and humbly said unto God, *Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt* (Ex. iii. 11.)? And though God vouchsafed to promise that he would be with him (Ver. 12.), and support him with his especial presence; yet he still declined the employment that seemed too high and difficult for him; and still distrustful his own abilities, and offered this excuse to God, *O my Lord, I am not eloquent neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken with thy servant; but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue* (Ex. iv. 10.).

But God was so far from accepting this excuse, that he immediately overruled it with this powerful reasoning, *Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind?*

Have not I the Lord? which may be rendered to this effect: Consider whose power you receive, and by whom you are entrusted with this great charge; Is not the mouth the work of my fingers? and did not every word in the tongue proceed from me? Did not I at first create all the faculties of man? and does not the use and exercise of them still depend upon me? Is any one endued with these gifts without my bounty? or is any one deprived of them by any other power but mine? Did I produce these things, and cannot I produce greater things than these? Cannot I direct them to my appointed ends? and cannot I execute my work without them? Cannot I supply any defect, or make that defect an instrument of my glory? Cannot I make the flow of speech eloquent, and proclaim my praises by the voice of the dumb? Cannot I give light to those that were born in darkness, and *unstop the ears of the deaf*? (Isa. xxxv. 5.) Doubt not, therefore, but with faith depend on my assistance. *Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings I have ordained strength, so still the enemy and the avenger* (Psalm viii. 2.): my spirit shall hereafter enable twelve illiterate Jews to speak the wonderful works of God (Acts, ii. 11.), in the language of every people under heaven; and thou also, how unequal soever thou seemest to this important work, how slow soever thou art of speech, shalt yet be *mighty in words and deeds* (Acts, vii. 22.); neither shall all the wisdom and power of Egypt be able to resist the wisdom and spirit, wherewith I will enable thee to speak.

From the words thus considered, with respect to the occasion and design of them, we may proceed more largely to consider,

First, That God is the author and giver of all our faculties and powers.

Secondly, That the defect and want of them proceeds also from him.

Thirdly, That he can supply their defect even in this life. And,

Fourthly, That he will abundantly repair and recompence it in the life to come.

And, first, We are to consider, that God is the author and giver of all our faculties and powers.

This indeed is implied in the general notion of our creation; and we cannot

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but know, that he who gave us our being, also gave us every thing that conduces to our welfare and happiness; and he that composed our whole frame, did also make the several parts that are composed in such wonderful order. But our minds are too narrow, to entertain at once a just and entire conception of the whole: the subject is too large to be comprehended in one view; and the debt of gratitude arising from it, is so immense a sum, that it surprizes and overpowers us. We may therefore more easily consider it by parts, and take a distinct notice of our several faculties. But even then the task would grow upon us, if we surveyed ourselves within as well as without, and endeavoured to behold our Creator building the inward chambers of the mind, and the dark enclosures of the heart; stretching out the capacious province of the thoughts, laying the sure and lasting foundations of the memory, and raising the curious scenes of the imagination. This glorious work cannot be perfectly described by any one, but him that made it. He prepared the heart for his dwelling-place; and he alone is thoroughly acquainted with the artful contrivance, and beautiful furniture of his own habitation; it is enough for us to survey our outward faculties, and dwell chiefly upon those that are contained in the text; the faculties of the tongue, the eye, and the ear.

That divine person, that appeared to Moses, was the angel of the new covenant, the ever blessed Jesus, the true and eternal God; it was he that made the worlds, and upholdeth all things by the word of his power; it was *he that stretched forth the heavens, and spread abroad the earth, and formed man from the womb* (Isa. xlv. 24.); and it was he that endued us with the speaking tongue, *the seeing eye, and the hearing ear* (Prov. xx. 12.).

When poor helpless man comes forth into a wretched world, a feeble, tender infant; he enables him only to signify and discover his wants, and call for redress by sounds of wailing, and the cries of complaint: he himself knows not the meaning of his own voice; and his affectionate parents can guess but uncertainly at the causes of his cry. The gift of speech is as yet like a talent buried in the earth, and the tongue is as yet too weak to exert it. Our wise Creator suf-

fers man to lie, for a time, in this impotent state, that he may grow up as a tender plant, under the watchful care of his parents, and in an absolute dependence upon him, our common father; and whensoever he has attained to manly strength, and the perfect use of his faculties, he may check his pride and presumption, with the remembrance of his former weakness.

But the infant does not long continue in this feeble condition; his strength is gradually confirmed, and his hands and sinews are rendered fit for the uses of life; his reason, that was at first imprisoned and concealed under the veil of flesh, begins to cast forth a glimmering light; and the shadows of the morning pass away, and then his tongue labours to improve itself, and with difficulty brings forth broken words, and efforts of speech; and he that made the mouth, guides and directs its motions, and educates and trains it up, till it ceases to speak of childish things, and is capable of answering the ends for which it was ordained; and that once artless voice, which could only complain, without telling the causes of its complaint, which in process of time could only endeavour to speak, and frame broken, dis-jointed words, is now enabled, by God's assistance, to reason and discourse, to communicate the thoughts and pleasures of the mind, or to impart and lessen its sorrows; to ask for help and counsel, or give to those that want it: with this glorious faculty man is qualified to do a world of good; though it too often is a world of evil. With this excellent talent, he may display all the powers of reason, and may with angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven, proclaim the honour of God that gave it; and with this he maintains a necessary and delightful intercourse and correspondence, with the members of human society, and bears a part in that peaceful harmony, which supports and preserves it. We cannot dwell too long upon this useful faculty, since every word in our tongue, is a subject that deserves our admiration; and it is capable of extending to all the languages in the world, and of giving a name to every creature.

He that formed the tongue still controls it with his power, and *turns it whithersoever he will: while the people of the earth*

earth was one, and they had all one language (Gen. xi. 6.), they joined in an impious confederacy against Heaven, and proudly rebelled against the Lord their maker. But he immediately blasted their vain presumption, by dividing their tongues, and rendering every man a stranger and a barbarian to his brother. But even this fatal curse made the tongue a greater instrument of his glory, and the differences of language severally bore a part in a grateful consort to his praise. Our heavenly Father dispensed the blessings of his grace, by the very means that he had used for their punishment; and the division of languages prepared the way for the miraculous gifts of tongues. He addressed himself as easily to the scattered branches of his family, the world, as if they had still been one people: and published his gospel in the different speech of every nation.

He that made the mouth, and qualified for all the offices of speech, was also the creator of the eye, and gave us the blessing of sight. The frame and situation of the eye, were there no other proof of the being of a God, would sufficiently prove and demonstrate his being. Infidelity itself has been vanquished by a close survey of this noble faculty; and instead of admiring its vain cavils and objection, has been constrained to admire and glorify the all-wise creator.

The eye is so advantageously placed, that it commands a large and comprehensive view, and so far resembles the eyes of the Lord, that are in every place, (Prov. xv. 3.), and run to and fro in the earth (Zech. iv. 10.), that it easily turns itself every way, looking upwards to behold that is the throne of God, or downwards to the earth, that is his footstool (Matth. v. 34, 35.), or round about that spacious circle, which the finger of God has drawn to encompass us on every side. And the pupil of the eye is capable of enlarging or contracting itself, that it may receive a just measure of light, and may not be oppressed with too great a multitude of objects.

The seat of the eye is a strong and substantial defence to that tender and delicate part; and to secure it from sudden and surprizing injuries, it is covered with several coats of the most curious frame and texture, and has a curtain drawn

before it to be let down, or lifted up, as occasion requires. For the quicker perception of objects, it is made of so tender and sensible a substance; and to guard it from the approaches of evil, it is endued with the earliest apprehensions of danger, and hastens to secure itself, at the first notice of it: and for its surer safety, our affectionate Father has engaged our strictest care in its defence, and made it so dear to us, that the object of our most fervent love cannot be dearer to us than the apple of our eye.

The skins through which the light is conveyed, are clear and transparent, that it may obtain an easy passage into the inmost rooms or cells of the eye, and may be turned into the beautiful variety of images that entertain the sight.

Light is truly pleasing in its own natural simplicity, and is the ornament and glory of every other object. But the eye receives it with a fresh, and always increasing pleasure, as it is varied and diversified by the different ways of reflection, and puts on so many sorts of colours, like several changes of raiment.

Every time that the eye opens and expands itself, it draws as it were the whole visible world into its narrow compass; and there is a new creation within itself. *The sun, that marvellous instrument of the Most High; the moon, that shineth in the firmament of heaven; the stars, that numberless host; the rainbow, that glorious circle which is bent by the hands of the Most High; the virgin purity, and unfulfilled whiteness of the snow; the beautiful embroidery of flowers; the rich cloathing of the meadows, and the cattle upon a thousand hills,* are presented to the eye by the Lord our maker, and set before it, as on a spacious theatre.

It is very observable, that though several nerves minister to the sight, and both the eyes are employed, yet the objects are not doubled or multiplied, but appear singly, as they are. All the nerves centre in one point, and both the eyes are helpful to each other, and behold their object as if they were but one.

That great light, that shews every thing to the eye, casts forth so bright and dazzling a lustre, that it would bear too hard upon it, and injure our mortal

faculty, by the beams of its majesty, if it were placed near to the sight; and therefore our gracious Creator has fixed it at a remote distance from us, that we may look upon it with pleasure, and enjoy its milder glory.

When the eye is wearied with its daily service, and the night spreads a veil of darkness over this lower world; the curtain, that is hung before the eye, falls down, being inclined by the weight of sleep, and the eye-lids are shut with a close seal, till we have renewed our strength, and the morning restores the world to our view. The screen that covers the eye, till the light arises, not only affords it necessary refreshment, but defends it from the secret and invisible perils and dangers of the night.

And when the day breaks, it does not shine forth at once in its full perfection, but gradually manifests itself, that the eye may not be over-powered, by a sudden issuing out, and too mighty a stream of light. The sun sends a harbinger before him, to give notice of his appearance; and when the dawning of the day has prepared us to receive him, *he comes forth like a bridegroom out of his chamber, clothed with light as with a garment* (Psalm xix. 5.).

Though every colour has a peculiar beauty, yet they are not all equally agreeable and refreshing to the eye; but the verdure of the fields is most particularly pleasing to it, and we can bear to dwell the longest upon it: and therefore God has chosen this for the common dress of nature, and made this colour most familiar with our sight. *He leads us through the green pastures*; and adorns the herbs and plants with many varieties even in the same colour, and changes it every day.

The time would fail me, should I attempt to speak of all the pleasures and advantages of sight; yet I cannot but observe, that the eyes are a faithful guard to the whole man, and are placed in a watch tower, to discern his danger, and give him friendly warning while it is yet afar off.

And I may yet farther observe, that the eye is very instrumental in promoting the happiness of conversation. It is the eye that meets our friend with a lively sparkling joy; and kindles and imparts the heavenly flame of friendship. It is

the eye that often speaks more powerfully than the tongue, and is a true interpreter of the thoughts. It is the eye that pities and spares, and (if I may so speak) yearns over the miserable object with the most generous compassion; and to say no more on this delightful subject, it was with the eye that our blessed Saviour reproved St. Peter for his repeated denial of him; and such was the force of this silent, but piercing rebuke, that the apostle was melted by it into tears of repentance, and *went out and wept bitterly* (Matt. xxvi. 75.). O Lord, *how marvellous are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all* (Psalm civ. 24.)

The eye that sees, gives witness to thee; and the ear that hears, confirms its testimony. The structure and fabric of the ear was the work of an almighty arm, and bears the undeniable tokens of infinite wisdom. The outward part of the ear, that is most exposed to assaults, is of a firm and solid nature, to defend itself. The passages from this outward gate are dark and intricate, and turn and wind about, so as to prevent the entrance of any thing that may obstruct the hearing, and to secure the inward parts from the sudden invasion of rough and disagreeable sounds: and the sounds that are brought upon the wings of the wind, are conveyed through many secret arches and caverns, that break the violence of their noise, and soften and improve them in their passage, that they may strike agreeably upon the ear.

Such is the power of this excellent faculty, that it enables us to converse with voices that are distant from us, and calls them home to itself; and it also qualifies us to enjoy the benefits of privacy, and conducts the secret whispers of our friends into our bosom. The ear is also helpful to the tongue, giving us our first notions of words, and teaching our infant-speech to frame them, by frequent attention, and studious imitation. Without the assistance of this faculty, we should be always ignorant of the signification of words, and entirely lose the distinction of sounds.

By the ear we maintain a necessary part in the conversation of the world, and partake with our brethren, in the pleasures and advantages of society. By the ear we hear the glad tidings of the gospel, which many prophets and kings

have desired to hear (Luk. x. 24.), and which the multitude of the heavenly host delighted to proclaim. And by the ear we shall hear the trumpet sound, to call the dead to life.

Thus the several faculties of the tongue, the eye, and the ear, have the characters of the divine power, wisdom, and goodness, stamped upon them; and we cannot enjoy the free and perfect exercise of these faculties, without lifting up our eyes to adore our Maker, our tongue to glorify him, and our ear to give attention to his praise.

But if the enjoyment of these blessings does not make a just impression upon us, we may consider,

Secondly, That the defect and want of them proceeds also from God.

If all men were endued with these faculties in the same degree and perfection, the perverse infidel would rather ascribe them to the necessity of nature, than to the wisdom and goodness of the Creator. And if they continued to enjoy them without alteration and decay, they would be prone to forget their dependance upon God, and presume too much upon the fulness of their strength. But *the potter*, to shew his power over the clay, hath of the same lump, made one vessel to honour, and another unto dishonour (Rom. ix. 21.); and it is sometimes his pleasure, that those vessels should afterwards be marred and impaired, which were at first exactly wrought by his almighty hand.

There are some, seemingly unhappy creatures, whose eyes were sealed up in darkness from the very womb, and whose eye-lids never let in the cheerful light of the sun. That glorious lamp of God ariseth and goeth down, and hasteth to the place where he rose. One season passeth away and another cometh (Eccles. i. 4, 5.). But the different beauties of the seasons afford them no change or variety. *The light is no light to them; the day is not clearer than the night; the darkness and light to them are both alike.* But yet there is no just occasion for that question of the disciples, *Who did sin, these men, or their parents, that they were born blind?* Our Saviour's answer should put an effectual stop to such inquiries; *Neither have these men sinned, nor their parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in them* (John, ix. 2.).

Others there are, that labour under

the confederate misfortunes of being deaf and dumb. Their ears never heard the reports of sound; the voices of their brethren always knocked at the gate of their ear in vain. There is no speech nor language to them; they distinguish not between the gentlest whisper, and the loudest thunder, but stand unmoved, even at that mighty noise at which *the earth trembles, and the depths are troubled* (Ps. lxxvii. 16.).

And their tongues being deprived of the necessary instruction of the ear, are unable to frame the words which they never heard, and how big soever their conceptions are, how great soever is the fire that is kindled within them, by an impatient eagerness and longing to express their thoughts, yet after all their striving to bring them forth, they cannot even at the last, *speak with their tongue.*

But yet the purposes of infinite wisdom are answered, by depriving them of the benefits of hearing and speech; and God will be abundantly justified, even in these, less perfect creatures.

And he also manifests his power, even in those that are furnished with these gifts, and shews, that the continuance and enjoyment of them depends entirely upon him.

The tongue that is withheld from speaking, during the weakness of infancy, returns again to his feeble state, when the infirmities of old age creep upon it: it loses its vigorous manly voice, performs its daily task with trembling and hesitation, and speaketh low, whispering as it were out of the dust of death.

The lively cheerful eye fades in the evening of life; its quick discernment is turned into a doubtful twilight, and a mist arises before it.

And the strokes of sound beat but faintly upon the ear; the wearied nerves can hardly discharge their office; the instruments of music are unable to charm the languishing faculty; the voice of the nearest friends seems to be no more than the faltering reports of a distant echo; and the yet living man is debarred from the pleasures of conversation, as if he were already in the land of silence.

But we need not have recourse to the weakness of age, to shew the uncertain continuance, and the certain decay, of these faculties.

How often is the most abundant fluency of speech, and the noblest eloquence of the tongue, arrested in the midst of its course, and while it is yet speaking, restrained from speaking any more!

How often is the piercing eye blasted in the exercise of its power, and snatched from perfect day into midnight darkness! How often is the parent of humours destructive to itself! How often does it stain its own light, and bring a fatal spot upon it, an eclipse that cannot be withdrawn!

And how often is the ear strained and violated, even by those sounds which it delights to hear! How often is it charged with obstructions that cannot be removed! How often are the impressions of the voice blotted out and defaced!

And God's glory is no less displayed by taking away, than by giving these faculties to men.

Till the prediction of the angel is fulfilled in the birth of St. John the Baptist, his father is dumb, and not able to speak, because he believed not the angel's words, which should be fulfilled in their season (Luke, i. 20.).

But when the child was born, and his name given him, according to divine appointment, his father's mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake and praised God (Luke, i. 64.).

As the goodness of God shone forth in this wonderful instance; so his justice no less appeared in punishing Elymas, the forcerer, with blindness, for perverting the right ways of the Lord. Now (says the apostle) behold the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a certain season; and immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness, and he went about, seeking some to lead him by the hand (Acts, xiii. 11.).

These miraculous instances (were there not a thousand others) would sufficiently prove, that our faculties are entirely in the power of God; and whether we enjoy or are deprived of them, we may say with Job, *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.* (Job, i. 21.). We proceed,

Thirdly, To consider, that he can supply their defect even in this life.

The streams of the divine bounty run in different channels, and though they do not rise to the same height in every channel, yet the fountain never fails. The abundance of one, makes up the

want of another; and every inequality is either immediately adjusted, or will at length be entirely removed.

All the blemishes, and seeming mistakes of nature, were ordered by the same infinite wisdom, as wrought and polished his more perfect works with an unerring hand. Both the one and the other are instruments in the hand that made them; and are equally capable of being directed and improved to the glory of God; for his service does not depend upon the strength or weakness of men.

Stammering lips and slowness of speech may execute the divine commission as well as a voice from heaven; and Moses, the meekest of men, notwithstanding the imperfections of his tongue, is as a God to Pharaoh (Exod. vii. 1.); and with unaffected simplicity, vanquishes all the enchantments of Egypt. For the Almighty was *with the mouth* of his servant, and *taught him what he should say* (Exod. iv. 15.).

When God has denied the use of any faculty to any of his children, he has frequently supplied the want of it, by gifts of a different kind. If the bodily eye has lost the privilege of sight, and never beheld the riches of the earth, and the glories of the heavens; yet it has been happy, in losing the dangerous view of those bewitching vanities that steal away the heart; and whilst the mind has been shut up within itself, and not permitted to wander through the distracting variety of sensual objects, it has more closely attended to its proper business, and looked more earnestly on the other world with the eye of faith.

The thoughts have afforded a sufficient recompence, for the outward disadvantages of the eye, and there is a *light ariseth in the darkness*, that enlivens the soul, and *the beams of glory rest upon this tabernacle of God*.

In like manner the defects of the ear, and the tongue, are answered and supplied by other benefits, and they need not complain that they are useless to each other. They are not acquainted with the rude clamours, and impertinent conversation of the world: and while there is nothing but silence round about them, the brain is enabled to perform a more perfect work; to dig for the hidden treasures of truth, to add to the experience of former ages, and enlarge the number

number of curious arts and inventions. And it has been justly observed, that the exactest lines, and the fairest resemblances of nature, have been drawn by the hand of those, whose ear never heard a voice, whose tongue never spoke a word. And painting is an art, in which the deaf and the dumb have wonderfully excelled. God has dispensed his blessings with such wisdom and goodness, that there is generally reason to rejoice, even where there seems to be reason to complain. And whilst we pity our brethren, for being in some respects less perfect; if we would attend a little, we should also find occasion to admire them, for being in other respects more perfect than ourselves. They have often peculiar advantages, as well as peculiar defects; and the misfortune of the one, is overbalanced by the happiness of the other. But were there more inequality in this life, yet the goodness of God would be entirely justified, because,

Fourthly, He will abundantly repair and recompence it in the life to come.

There the tender infant, that is snatched away at the very entrance of life, and cut off before the blossom has opened itself, to enjoy the light of the sun, will be born again in everlasting strength, and attain at once to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ (Eph. iv. 13.). There the strings of the tongue, that were never loosed, will be as the lute and harp, to sound forth the praises of God. There the glorious army of the holy innocents will sing a new song before the throne, as with the voice of many waters, and as with the voice of a great thunder. (Rev. xiv. 2.) That almighty command, *Be thou opened* (Mark, vii. 34.), shall open every mouth, and break the bands of every tongue, and enable them to speak words that are as yet unspeakable, which it is not lawful as yet for a man to utter (Cor. ii. 1, 2. 4.).

The angels of God shall call forth the blind from the darkness of the grave, saying, *Arise, shine, for your light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. Lift up your eyes round about, and see what a glorious host is gathered together, to attend upon the Lord of life: how bright a company of stars follow the Sun of Righteousness. That sun which you sought in vain to behold, shall not be your light by day, neither shall the moon, that*

decreaseth in her perfection, give light unto you. But the Lord shall be unto you an everlasting light, and your God, your glory. (Isaiah, lx.)

Those eyes that saw but through a glass darkly, shall see God himself face to face (1 Cor. xiii. 12.). Those eyes that were dazzled at beholding an excellent object, and impaired by looking too earnestly upon it, shall be strong enough to behold the majesty of God for ever, and delight to dwell for ever upon him *who is a consuming fire* (Heb. xii. 29.).

The ear shall no longer be deprived of hearing, neither shall it attend with difficulty to the uncertain reports of sound, but be raised in perfect strength, infinitely greater than the strongest faculty ever enjoyed before: and it shall hear the delightful words of pure and eternal truth, the instructions of infinite wisdom, the dispensations of providence justified, and the mysteries of our redemption explained.

And as the tongue shall bear a part in those praises and hallelujahs that are offered to him that sits on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever (Rev. v. 13.); so the ear shall hear their delightful harmony, with an increase of pleasure, to all eternity.

What great and glorious things are spoken of thee, thou city of God! (Psalm lxxxvii. 2.) *even such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, are prepared for them that love their God.* (1 Cor. ii. 9.) That they should excel every thing that our eyes have seen, every thing that our ears have heard, this alone is enough to raise our admiration, and kindle an eager desire of attaining to them.

But they not only excel all the objects of our senses, but surpass our understandings, and cannot be brought within the compass of our conceptions. The thoughts of men have so wide a range, and spread themselves so far on every side, that he alone can know their bounds, who laid the measures of the earth, and stretched out the line upon it (Job, xxviii. 5.). And yet when we have conceived every thing that our mind is capable of conceiving, when we have given a loose to all our conjectures, and allowed the largest scope to our imaginations, we shall fall infinitely short of that glory and hap-

pinefs that will enter in at all our fenfes, and fill every faculty of the foul, in the city of God. And yet thofe miserable creatures, that are now deprived of the ufe of fome of their faculties, and are but meanly endowed with the gifts of reafon and fenfe, are heirs of this blefled inheritance, and partakers of thefe delightful hopes. And if they do not hide that one talent that is committed to their charge, they will be rewarded with thofe that had *five talents* (Mat. xxv.), and be recompenced for their fmall measure of earthly advantage, with the riches of heaven, and *the fulnefs of God* (Eph. iii. 19.).

Having confidered each of the particulars that I propofed to you, I fhall draw a few practical inferences from them. And,

First, Since God is the author and giver of all our faculties and powers, we fhould gratefully devote them to his honour and fervice. The eye and obfervation of God is ever upon us, and as he made our faculties, fo he has an abfolute knowledge of their frame, and cannot be ignorant of the ufe or abufe of them. It is he that conveys the founds to our ear, and prepares it to receive them, in a diftinguifhing manner. And he can as eafily hear the whifpers of our fecret fins, as the outrageous clamours of our open impiety.

There is not a word in our tongue but he knoweth it altogether, even before it falls from our lips. He is acquainted with every thing that it is capable of fpeaking, and difcerns *the ungodlinefs and vanity that is under the tongue* (Pfal. cxxxix. 4.—x. 7.).

He follows the wandering of the eye, and marks the place where it refts, and the objects on which it delights to dwell. And *his eyes, that are ten thoufand times brighter than the fun* (Ecclus. xxiii. 19.), behold the flame of luft, while it is yet kindling, and the feeds of iniquity, before they fpring forth.

In the prefence of fuch a witnefs, we fhould be efpecially careful to ufe our faculties aright, and answer the gracious intention of our great Creator.

We fhould confider that we alone, of all his earthly creatures, are endued with reafon and fpeech, and therefore can perform a nobler fervice, than any of our fellow-creatures in this world can perform. Every one of them indeed difcharges his proper fervice, and the curious workmanfhip, even of the vileft animal, and the

fmalleft plant, difplays the wifdom and power of the Lord their maker. But man alone is capable of fpeaking his praife, and paying the common debt of gratitude with the words of his tongue: and while he offers his own tribute to the King of kings, he can alfo collect the fhare of every other creature, and make up a mighty fum with the united obligations of all the works of God.

We fhould therefore do every thing that lies in our power, to promote the honour of God, and ftrictly abftain from every thing that tends to his difhonour.

We fhould never utter the pernicious words of falfehood, or violate the eternal truth of God. We fhould never offend his purity with lewd and vicious jefts, or provoke his majesty with bold and impudent profanenefs.

Let the haughty blafphemer, that glories in the denial of the blefled Jefus, let him remember by whom he was made, whose hand it was that framed the mouth, and who gave him that tongue, by which he denies him. Let him put thefe ftartling queftions to himfelf: *Whom haft thou reproached and blafphemed? And againft whom haft thou exalted thy voice; and lifted up thine eyes on high* (Ifa. xxxvii. 23.)? And let him return (as he ought to return) this answer to himfelf, *Even againft the Holy One, that created man upon the earth, and will command him to return to the earth again.*

Let us remember that our all-feeing witnefs is of *purer eyes than to behold iniquity* (Hab. i. 13.); and let us endeavour to copy after him, by preferving the purity of our eyes; and never pollute them, by beholding evil, with a wicked complacency, and partaking with it by a guilty approbation.

Let us open them every morning to admire the Lord of the creation, for the beauty of his works; and let us clofe them every night, with a grateful fenfe of the benefits that are daily difplayed before us.

Let us give attention to his holy word, and rejoice to hear thofe glad tidings which were brought down from heaven by the Son of God; and let us turn away our ear from hearing abominations, and thut it clofe againft thofe dreadful curfes of wicked men, that are enough to *make every ear that heareth them to tingle* (1 Sam. iii. 11.).

Secondly,

Secondly, Since the defect and want of our faculties proceeds also from God, we should not despise or ridicule the wants and infirmities of our brethren. God has offered several objects to our pity, but has made none of his creatures for our contempt: and indeed contempt becomes us no more than pride, which was not made for man. It consists of the worst ingredients, vanity and presumption, and proceeds from those equally mistaken judgments, by which we undervalue others, and over-value ourselves. If we stand upon the higher ground, it was God that placed us there: and if our brother is somewhat lower, it was God that assigned him his station. *We cannot make one hair white or black, neither can we add one cubit to our stature* (Mat. v. 36. vi. 27.).

Who art thou then, that lookest down with scorn and disdain, upon thy poor maimed, or deformed neighbour? Consider, vain wretch, that *he that made thee in the womb, made him*; and though there are diversities of gifts, yet it is one and the self-same Lord, that divideth to every man, severally as he will (Job, xxxi. 15. 1 Cor. xii.): and the power that gave thee a greater abundance of blessings, can strip thee at once of all thy pride and glory, and bestow more abundant honour upon him that wanted.

Both may be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor. xv. 52.); thou mayst be cast down to a level with the beasts that perish; and thy despised brother may be raised to an equality with the angels of God.

Let this consideration restrain us all from that injurious contempt, which, though it falls immediately upon the works of God, is, in effect, a reproach to God their Creator.

Instead of mocking at their calamity, and making a jest of their misfortunes, let us assist them according to our ability,

and plead the cause of the dumb, and be *ears to the deaf, and eyes to the blind* (Job, xxix. 15.).

Thirdly and lastly, Since God will either supply their defects, or abundantly repair and recompence them in the life to come, let them submit to the will of God, and wait with patience *till their change cometh* (Job, xiv. 14.). The dumb may consider, that the present life is but as the state of infancy, and the tongue is always held in the bands of silence, during the continuance of that weak condition. But after the months of their infancy are past away, their mouth will be opened, and their tongue will break loose from its restraint, and speak of the wonderful works of God. Were they not denied the gift of speech, they could only talk as children in this present life; but in the life to come, they will have a nobler subject of discourse, and entirely put away childish things.

The blind may comfort themselves with the thought, that a great deal of sin and misery is withheld from their eyes, and even those things that are truly worthy of their sight, are discerned but imperfectly, and *seen but through a glass darkly*; but the veil will one day be removed; and though they are now confined to constant darkness, yet *in their flesh they shall see God; whom they shall see for themselves, and their eyes shall behold, and not another's* (Job, xix. 25. 27.). And the deaf may compose themselves with the certain expectation of hearing infinitely more than the ear has ever heard, or can yet be expressed by all the tongues of men and angels.

And whatsoever we want, or suffer, let us give all glory to God, and say, *Great and marvellous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints* (Rev. xiii. 3.).

S E C T I O N III.

FROM THE

SERMONS of the Right Rev. THOMAS SHERLOCK, D.D.
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S E R M O N I.
Salvation by Jesus Christ.

HEBREWS, vii. 25.

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

WHEN we consider the great and wonderful work of our redemption, though we cannot account for every step of it to our own reason and understanding, yet neither can we imagine it to be the effect of mere will and arbitrary appointment, and void of all foundation in the reason and propriety of things. All the works of God are works of wisdom; and, as far as our capacities give us leave to judge, we discern evident marks of wisdom in them all, and discover a fitness and propriety in every thing with respect to the end which it is intended to serve or promote. If this be so in every instance in which we are able to make any judgment, it is a great presumption that it is, and must be, so in all other instances, which are too high and great to be viewed and measured by human understanding: and we have one positive argument that it is so, arising from the natural notion we have of God, and of his attributes of wisdom and justice. It is impossible to suppose such a Being to do any thing by chance, or in compliance to mere will and humour. No: every act of God is the act of infinite wisdom, and is founded in the necessary reason and propriety of things: and it is as true of the works of grace, as it is of the works of nature, that *in wisdom he has ordained them all*.

It is one thing not to be able to discern the reasons of Providence, and an-

other to suppose there is no reason in them. The reasons, that made it either necessary or proper for Christ to die for the sins of mankind, may be removed out of our sight: but to suppose that Christ really did die for the sins of the world, and yet that there was no reason or propriety in his so doing, is to found revealed religion upon a principle destructive of natural religion: for no religion can subsist, with an opinion that God is a Being capable of acting without reason.

The publication of the Gospel has made an alteration in the scheme of religion, by revealing to us the Son of God, *whom God hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person; who upholdeth all things by the word of his power* (Heb. i. 2, 3.).

The knowledge of the Son of God, of his power and dominion in the creating and upholding all things, became necessary, as the foundation of the faith required to be placed in him as our Redeemer. The character of Redeemer would be but ill supported by any person who had not power equal to the great undertaking. The New Testament doctrines therefore, relating to the dignity and authority of Jesus Christ, are relative to his office of Redeemer; and therefore there was no explicit declaration of them either before or under the law of Moses.

Natural religion leads us by certain conclusions to the acknowledgment of one supreme intelligent Being, the Author and Creator of all things, and can by no reasoning whatever discover any other being concerned in the making, framing, or governing the world: and therefore all

the hopes and fears; in a word, all the religious acts of man, in the state of natural religion, are necessarily and immediately relative to this one Supreme Being. But put the case, that natural religion could possibly discover that this one Supreme Being had an eternal Son, to whom he had communicated all power and authority, who was the immediate Creator, Governor, and Judge of mankind; I beseech you to consider, whether, upon this supposition, there would not necessarily arise an alteration in natural religion; whether the hopes and fears, and all other religious acts of mankind, would not relate immediately to this their immediate Creator, Governor, and Judge. Can it be reasonably supposed, that we were created by the Son of God, that we are now under his government, and shall be finally under his judgment; and at the same time maintained, that no service, obedience, or regard is due to him from us his creatures and subjects? If this cannot be maintained consistently with this supposition, the conclusion will be, that the religion of a Christian is a natural and reasonable service, arising from the relation between Christ and mankind, which the Gospel has revealed and made known to the world.

When we consider what expectations we have from our Redeemer, and what great promises he has made to us in his Gospel, we cannot possibly avoid inquiring who this person is: when we hear his promise to be always present with us to the end of the world, to support us under all our difficulties, it is but a reasonable demand to ask by what authority he does these things: and when we are told that he liveth for ever, and is the Lord of life and of glory, there is no room to doubt of his being able to save us. St. Paul tells us, that the Lord Jesus Christ *shall change our vile bodies, that they may be fashioned like unto his glorious body*: a great expectation this! But consider what the reasonable foundation of this expectation is: St. Paul tells us, it is the energy of power with which Christ is endued, *whereby he is able even to subdue all things to himself*. Our Saviour puts this article upon the same foot. Hear his declaration: *Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that*

hear shall live. In the next verse the reason follows: *For, as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself* (John, v. 25, 26.). If the Son has life in himself, even as the Father has life in himself; if he is really endued with power to which all nature submits and obeys, a power sufficient for the creation of the world at first, and for the preservation ever since; we have reason to conclude, that he is now as able to restore life, as he was at first to give it; to call men from the grave into being, as well as to call them out of nothing at the first creation.

The relation of Christ to mankind as Creator and Governor considered, the work of redemption could not properly have been undertaken by any other hand; for, if Christ was the immediate Creator and Governor of the world, what reason can you imagine why God should resume this authority out of the hands of his Son, or set up another to have dominion and authority over any part of the creation, which by natural right belonged to him, who made all things? Were we to consider one person as our Creator, and another as our Redeemer, it would be extremely to the diminution of the honour and regard due to the Creator, inasmuch as the blessing of redemption would greatly outweigh the benefit of creation; and it would be natural to us to prefer the love that delivered us from the evils and miseries of the world, to that which placed us in them. In the daily service of our church we praise God for creating and preserving us, but above all for his inestimable love in the redemption; which is very consistent with respect to one great benefactor, who both made us and redeemed us: but, had any other hand redeemed us, such expression of gratitude to him would have reflected dishonour upon the Creator.

St. Paul tells us expressly, that Christ is head of the church; a title founded in the right of redemption, *that in all things he might have the pre-eminence*; that as he was the head of all creatures in virtue of having created them, so he might be the head of the church, the elect people of God, in virtue of having redeemed them: *for it pleased the Father, that in him should all fullness dwell*; that is, that Christ should be all in all, the head

head of the second as well as of the first creation (Coloss. i. 19.). According to St. Paul's reasoning here, if any other person had redeemed the world, or if the world had been redeemed without Christ, he would not *have had the pre-eminence in all things*; which yet he had before sin came into the world; and, consequently, the sin of the world would have been the diminution of the headship and power of Christ. Upon these principles of the Gospel revelation we may discern some propriety in Christ's coming to redeem the world: the work was such, that no person of less power could undertake it; and his relation to the world was such, as made it fit and proper to commit the work to him.

The redemption of mankind is a work which in the event seems to concern men only: but, considered as a vindication of the justice and goodness of God towards his creatures, it is a work exposed to the consideration of every intelligent being in the universe. Whether they may be supposed to inquire into God's dealings with the children of men, we may judge by ourselves. It is little we know of the fall of angels: yet how has that employed human curiosity! for every man considers himself as having an interest in the justice and equity of that Supreme Being, under whose government he lives, and by whose judgment he must finally stand or fall. If we doubt whether the superior orders of beings have the like inclination, St. Peter will tell us, *that the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow, are things the angels desire to look into* (1 Pet. i. 11, 12.). And indeed the method of God's dealing with any rational creature is a common concern to all; and it is for the honour of God's government to be vindicated in the sight of every intelligent being, *that he may be justified in his saying, and overcome when he is judged.*

If this be so, it must necessarily follow, that the redemption by Christ, though it relates immediately to men, must be agreeable to all the reason and relation of things, known or discoverable by the highest intellectual beings; and need I add, that there are many such not discoverable by us?

It is certain that we are but a small part of the intellectual world: what relation we bear to the other parts, or to

the whole, we know not; and yet undoubtedly the common Governor of the whole, must in his dealings with every part have regard to this common relation, whether we understand it, or no. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us, *that Christ took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham.* Angels sinned, and men sinned: men only are redeemed. If God is just, there must be a reason for this, though not within our reach at present; and, when we come to know it, perhaps we may be no longer at a loss to know that the sacrifice of Christ was necessary to the salvation of men.

That there are many orders of beings superior to man, is a proposition to agreeable to reason, that there is little room to doubt of it. All these orders are in Scripture comprehended under the general name of angel. What relation these beings stand in to us in many respects, I will not now inquire: but that they are not unconcerned spectators in the work of our redemption, is evident. Our Saviour tells us, *there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth* (Luke, xv. 10.): again; *he that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life; but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels* (Rev. iii. 5.). Here the angels are mentioned as witnesses of the justice of the judgment, and not merely as attendants to make up the pomp and ceremony of judicature.

Since then the justice and equity of God in redeeming men are things which the angels desire and are concerned to look into; it is evident, that his justice and equity, and the reasons of providence in this great affair, may be discernible to the highest order of intellectual beings, though not discoverable by us, the lowest.

That this is probably the case, may be learnt from hence; that, where the Gospel has revealed to us any of these relations, not discoverable by human reason, so far we can see the reason and propriety of this great work of our redemption.

But let us consider how well these principles and doctrines of the Gospel agree together, and how naturally the one flows from the other. When we view the sad condition of mankind, the

in, folly, and misery, which are in the world; and then turn to contemplate the perfections, the wisdom, and the goodness of him who made us; nature raises some hopes in us that this confusion will some day find a remedy, and ourselves a release, from the goodness and wisdom of him who formed us. I blame not these hopes; they are just, they are natural. But, if nature had the knowledge of the Son of God, and could discover that the world was made and is upheld by his power, that we are his immediate creatures and subjects; would it not be altogether as natural to found some hopes upon this relation? Should we not be willing to believe, that this great person, who made us, would have some compassion upon the work of his own hands? Should we not hope to find in him at least an intercessor on our behalf, an advocate with the Father? Should we not be inclined to recommend to him all our pleas, to put all our interest into his hands, trusting that he could not want bowels of affection towards the creatures whom he formed after his own image and likeness? I think this would be but natural; and what more does the Gospel require of us? It has discovered to us this relation between Christ and the world, between Christ and the church, and requires from us such hope and faith, and such obedience as naturally flow from this relation: and could it possibly require less? Would it not be absurd to tell us, that Christ is Lord of the world that is, and of that which is to come, and not to require us to have hope and confidence in him? Would it not be absurd to tell us, that he is the Lord of life and glory, and to bid us expect life and glory through any other hands than his? Would it not be absurd to tell us, that all judgment is committed to the Son, and yet no obedience due to him? or that God has appointed him to be head over all, and yet no honour to be paid him?

From these and the like considerations we may discern how reasonable, how natural, the religion of the Gospel is. It has indeed opened to us a new scene of things, discovering to us the ever blessed Son of God, the Creator and Governor of the world: what else it proposes to us results naturally from this relation between Christ and the world.

The mysterious work of our redemption itself seems to have arisen from the original relation between the only Son of God, and man the creature of God; and our Christian faith, in every article and branch of it, has a just foundation and support, in the power, authority, and pre-eminence of the Son of God. We well may believe he has redeemed us, since we know he made us. And, though all nature seems to frown on us, and to threaten death and destruction, from which no human power or cunning can deliver us; yet our hope is steadfast and unmoveable, being placed in him who is *able to subdue all things to himself.*

This belief, that the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and arise to life, is the fundamental article of a Christian's faith: if this be not well established, our hope and confidence are vain, and the preaching the cross of Christ is foolishness.

Let us reflect a little how our case stands with respect to the prospect beyond the grave; let us consider what hopes nature furnishes, and how they are supported, confirmed, and enlarged, by the Gospel of Christ Jesus.

When we view the world in its present circumstances, and see the misery and oppression that are in it; when we consider that the distresses and sorrows arising from the weakness and the wickedness of men are in number and in weight ten times more than all the sufferings to which we are exposed by the mere frailty of our condition; we can hardly imagine that a wise and just God made the world to be what we find it is. When we look farther, and find that the best men oftentimes fare worst; that even the desire and endeavour to please God frequently exposes them to infinite sorrows in this world; we stand amazed, and are ready to doubt whether these appearances can be reconciled with the belief that God governs the world. But, since all nature proclaims the being and power of God, and the visible things of the creation declare in every language of the world, the wisdom and goodness of him who made them; under the force and conviction of this evidence that there is a God, we can find no possible way to account for his justice and goodness towards the children of men, but by supposing that *he has appointed a day in which*

which he will judge the world in righteousness: and since this world is not evidently the scene of this judgment, we conclude there must be another, in which we shall stand before his tribunal. Thus far nature goes: all beyond this is vain philosophy and imagination, founded in conceits which are in vogue to-day and forgot to-morrow. Scholars may reason of the nature of the soul, and the condition of it when separated from the body; but the common hopes of nature receive no support from such inquiries. But yet something farther seems necessary to give ease to nature in this painful search after life and happiness. The numberless instances of mortality which we hear and see, the remains of those who left the world ages before we came into it, and are still mouldering in their tombs, is undeniable evidence that death destroys this compound being which we call man. How to revive this union nature knows not: and as for those who make the spirits of men in the divided state to be perfect men, they seem to have got a conclusion without consulting the premises.

Look now into the Gospel; there you will find every reasonable hope of nature, nay, every reasonable suspicion of nature cleared up and confirmed, every difficulty answered and removed. Do the present circumstances of the world lead you to suspect that God could never be author of such corrupt and wretched creatures as men now are? Your suspicions are just and well founded: God made man upright, but through the temptation of the devil sin entered, and death and destruction followed after.

Do you suspect, from the success of virtue and vice in this world, that the providence of God does not interpose to protect the righteous from violence, or to punish the wicked? The suspicion is not without ground. God leaves his best servants here to be tried oftentimes with affliction and sorrow, and permits the wicked to flourish and abound. The call of the Gospel is not to honour and riches here, but to take up our cross and follow Christ.

Do you judge, from comparing the present state of the world with the natural notion you have of God, and of his justice and goodness, that there must needs be another state in which justice

shall take place? You reason right: and the Gospel confirms the judgment. God has appointed a day to judge the world in righteousness: then those who mourn shall rejoice, those who weep shall laugh, and the persecuted and afflicted servants of God shall be heirs of his kingdom.

Have you sometimes misgivings of mind? Are you tempted to mistrust this judgment, when you see the difficulties which surround it on every side; some which affect the soul in its separate state, some which affect the body in its state of corruption and dissolution? Look to the Gospel: there these difficulties are accounted for; and you need no longer puzzle yourself with dark questions concerning the state, condition, and nature of separate spirits, or concerning the body, however to appearance lost and destroyed; for the body and soul shall once more meet to part no more, but to be happy for ever. In this case the learned cannot doubt, and the ignorant may be sure, that it is the man, the very man himself, who shall rise again: for an union of the same soul and body is as certainly the restoration of the man, as the dividing them was the destruction.

Would you know who it is that gives this assurance? It is one who is able to make good his word; one who loved you so well as to die for you; yet one too great to be held a prisoner in the grave: no; he rose with triumph and glory, the first-born from the dead, and will in like manner call from the dust of the earth, all those who put their trust and confidence in him.

But who is this, you will say, who was subject to death, and yet had power over death? How could so much weakness and so much strength meet together? That God has the power of life, we know; but then he cannot die: that man is mortal, we know; but then he cannot give life.

Consider; does this difficulty deserve an answer, or does it not? Our blessed Saviour lived among us in a low and poor condition, exposed to much ill-treatment from his jealous countrymen: when he fell into their power, their rage knew no bounds: they reviled him, insulted him, mocked him, scourged him, and at last nailed him to a cross, where by a shameful and wretched death he finished a life of sorrow and affliction.

Did we know no more of him than this, upon what ground could we pretend to hope that he will be able to save us from the power of death? We might say with the disciples, *We trusted this had been he who should have saved Israel*; but he is dead, he is gone, and all our hopes are buried in his grave.

If you think this ought to be answered, and that the faith of a Christian cannot be a reasonable faith, unless it be enabled to account for this seeming contradiction, I beseech you then never more complain of the Gospel for furnishing an answer to this great objection, for removing this stumbling-block out of the way of our faith. He was a man, and therefore he died: he was the Son of God, and therefore he rose from the dead, and will give life to all his true disciples. He it was who formed this world and all things in it, and for the sake of man was content to become man, and to taste death for all, that all through him may live. This is a wonderful piece of knowledge which God has revealed to us in his Gospel; but he has not revealed it to raise our wonder, but to confirm and establish our faith in him to whom he hath committed all power, *whom he hath appointed heir of all things*.

Had the gospel required of us to expect from Christ the redemption of our souls and bodies, and given us no reason to think that Christ was endued with power equal to the work, we might justly have complained; and it would have been a standing reproach, that Christians believe they know not what. But to expect redemption from the Son of God, the resurrection of our bodies from the same hand which at first created and formed them, are rational and well-founded acts of faith; and it is the Christian's glory, that he *knows in whom he has believed*.

That the world was made by the Son of God, is a proposition with which reason has no fault to find: that he who made the world should have power to renew it to life again, is highly consonant to reason. All the mystery lies in this, that so high and great a person should condescend to become man, and subject to death, for the sake of mankind. But are we the fit persons to complain of this transcendent mysterious love? Or, does it become us to quarrel with the kindness

of our blessed Lord towards us, only because it is greater than we can conceive? No; it becomes us to bless and to adore this exceeding love, by which we are saved from condemnation, by which we expect to be rescued from death; knowing, that the power of our blessed Lord is equal to his love, and that he is *able to subdue all things to himself*.

SERMON II.

Christ's Temptation in the Wilderness.

LUKE, iv. 1, 2.

And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan, and was led by the spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted of the devil.

AFTER our Saviour had washed his disciples feet, and wiped them with a towel, *he said unto them, know ye what I have done to you?* None answering this question, he explained to them himself the meaning of what he had done: *ye call me, says he, Master, and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord, neither he that is sent, greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.* Should you ask the like question concerning the history in the text, our Saviour's temptation in the wilderness, and say, what is this that has been done unto him? How came the Son of God to be thus insulted by the powers of darkness? Whence arose the tempter's confidence and power? or why were consummate virtue and innocence submitted to this proof and trial? You might be answered in like manner also, *he hath given us an example, that we should do as he hath done.* Were you to hear the complaints, which even good men often make, that they are forced to struggle with many and with great temptations; that the paths of virtue are slippery and insecure, beset with many dangers; and that their prayers to be delivered from their trials come empty back, and bring no blessing with them;

them; you might in our Saviour's name and in his words expostulate the case with them: *ye call me Lord and Master: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then your Lord and Master have been perfected through trials, and in all things tempted even like unto you, whence come your complaints? Whence is it that you expect to be exempted from that condition to which I willingly submitted? The servant is not greater than his Lord, neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him, I have led the way, and shewn you how to conquer: and if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.*

Since these things therefore are written for our instruction and admonition, the properest use we can make of them is to consider them in that view, and to keep at a distance from such nice questions as no man enters into with discretion, or gets out of with advantage. There is room in all the parts of the gospel dispensation to admire and adore the wisdom and the goodness of God, if that will content us, without prying into the secret methods of his providence. In this case now before us we want not matter of this kind: when the tempter allured our first parents to disobedience, with the flattering hopes that they should be as gods, little did the blind prophet think that the day should ever come when the Son of God would appear in the likeness of man, to take vengeance of his bold attempt, to destroy his works, and to redeem the captives into the glorious liberty even of the Sons of God: little did he imagine that man, who fell by aspiring to be like God, should ever indeed be so like him, as to be superior to all his arts and temptations, and be able to drive him from the dominion he had usurped over the creation. And yet, behold the wisdom and the goodness of God! by man came death, and by man came the plenteousness of redemption: the first fruits of which we see in this victory over the tempter.

Thus with respect to God does this temptation afford an ample subject of praise and glory: but, considered with respect to ourselves, it will yield us the greatest comfort and consolation to support us in our spiritual warfare, and the best instruction how to behave ourselves in it. There is no doubt to be made but that all the tempter's art was

displayed against our Saviour: here then we may learn the worst we have to fear, and see the dangers we have to pass, in our way to happiness, and secure ourselves against the surprises which are often fatal to heedless unguarded innocence: here too we may learn from the best example, how to make the best defence against the different temptations we stand exposed to; how manfully to maintain the combat, and to resist the fiery darts of the devil.

These lessons of Christian prudence and fortitude are to be learnt from our Saviour's conduct and behaviour under the different trials the tempter made of him: but I propose at this time to consider the circumstances which attended this temptation, and are recorded by the evangelist in my text: *and Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan, and was led by the spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted of the devil.* Now this temptation, we see, succeeded immediately to his baptism, in which the spirit visibly descended upon him; and God declared him, in a voice from heaven, to be his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased. And accordingly the text expressly tells us, that he was led to be tempted, *being full of the Holy Ghost.*

You see the power of baptism, and the blessings that are annexed to it, to which all are entitled who partake in the baptism of Christ: for himself he was neither born nor baptised, but for our sakes; that the blessings of both might descend on us, who, through faith, are heirs together with him of the promises of God.

By baptism the gates of heaven are set open to us, and the way paved for our return to our native country: by baptism we are declared to be such sons of God in whom he will delight, and whom he will appoint to be heirs of his kingdom: by baptism we receive the promise of the spirit, by which we cry, Abba, Father.

Are not these great privileges? And is not here room for mighty expectations? And yet how unfuitable to these claims do the circumstances of a Christian's life often appear? He is upon the road to heaven, you say, and the gates stand open to receive him; but how does he stumble and fall like other men, and sometimes lose his way, and wander long,

ing, bewildered in night and darkness? if he keeps the road, how lazily does he travel, as if he were unwilling to come to his journey's end, and afraid to leave the country which he is going to possess? The christian only of all men pretends to supernatural power and strength, and an intimate acquaintance with the spirit of God: and yet how hardly does he escape the pollutions of the world, and how often look back with languishing eyes upon the pleasures, riches, and honours of this life? And though he boasts of more than human strength, yet how does he sometimes sink below the character and dignity even of a man? Ye sons of God, for such ye are, how do you die like the children of men, and how like is your end to theirs?

And what must we say of these things? Is the promise of God become of none effect? Is baptism sunk into mere outward ceremony, and can no longer reach to the purifying the heart and mind? The last must not be disputed: it is too evident, at least in these our days, that the lives of christians do not answer to the manifold gifts and graces bestowed on them: and it is as true, that this has given great occasion to the enemies of the Gospel to blaspheme, to ridicule the grace of God, which seems to them to be no real, no useful gift or power. But when it is certain, on the other side, that these prejudices have arisen from the mistaken notions which men have entertained concerning the grace of God: their expectations have been groundless and unwarrantable: they have promised themselves more than ever God promised them; and then finding that grace is not what they expected and hoped it was, they rashly conclude that it is nothing; and argue against the truth of God's promises merely from the vanity and delusion of their own. If you expect that the grace of God should ward off all temptations from you, or rescue you from the power and influence of them, notwithstanding your own remissness and want of care; as well may you expect that swords and pistols should fight your battles, subdue your enemies, and conquer countries for you, whilst your soldiers lie dissolved in ease and luxury, and forget to use their arms. The graces of

the spirit are the arms of a Christian, with which he is to enter the lists against the powers of darkness; and are a certain indication to us that God intends to call us to the proof and exercise of our virtues: why else does he give us this additional strength? We had strength enough of our own to sit still and do nothing; had it been his intention to remove us out of the way of temptation, and to place us out of danger, our weakness and security might well have stood together; and having no enemy to fear, we should not have been in need of so powerful an ally as the spirit of God. But since our dangers are great, and even necessary to the trial of our faith and patient continuance in well-doing, therefore are we supported and encouraged by the assistance of God, *to fight the good fight, and to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.* To this we are called by the example of our Lord and Master, who being full of the *Holy Ghost* was led by the spirit *to be tempted*: and this plainly intimates to us, that the more abundant grace we receive, the more reason we have to expect trials and temptations; and *that to whom much is given, of him much shall be required.*

And if this be the case, as most certainly it is, we may, I think, as necessary consequences, deduce these two things:

I. That the temptations which good men are exposed to, and often are forced to struggle hard with, are no proof that they want the spirit of God, or that his favour and kindness are in any degree lessened toward them.

II. That the sins which Christians fall into and continue in, are no proof that they had not the spirit and grace sufficient to have preserved their innocence.

Let us consider these two cases. The temptations which good men are exposed to, and are forced often to struggle hard with, are no proof that they want the spirit of God, or that his favour and kindness are in any degree lessened toward them. And yet the dread of this is but too common an ingredient in the temptations which good men suffer under: it is that which always lies at bottom where there are any symptoms of despair; and when an honest soul is harassed with doubts and misgivings of mind, and

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persecuted with dismal thoughts and fears, both of what is present and what is to come, it is from this bitter root, generally speaking, that all the misery springs. Men are apt to imagine, that had they the spirit of God, the wicked one would either not dare to approach them, or, if he did, that they should soon be able to quench his fiery darts, and to command him with authority to get behind their backs. But when temptation grows upon them, and though often repulsed, yet as often with redoubled force renews the assault, then they begin to suspect themselves, to fear lest they are given up to destruction, and deserted by the spirit of God. And when these fears possess the heart, like spies and traitors got within the town, they betray the strength of it to the enemy; they stifle all the generous thoughts of vigorous opposition, and leave the heart, thus bereaved of courage and constancy, and fidelity to itself, an easy prey to the invader.

The first thing then necessary in our spiritual warfare is rightly to apprehend our own condition, and the dangers and difficulties we are to meet with; that when they come we may be under no surprise, but may be able to stand firm, and collected both in courage and in counsel, to make our just defence. And for this purpose did the Author and Captain of our salvation leave us his example, that it might serve equally for our instruction and imitation. And hence we may learn, that our temptations are so far from being a proof that we want the spirit of God, that they are rather a proof of the contrary: *God is faithful, and will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear.* And therefore, if he suffers our temptations to be great, he will administer strength great in proportion. For the first part of our Saviour's life, we read of no temptations that befel him; but no sooner did he receive the spirit, but he was led to be tempted. And how did it fare with him? He still conquered, and yet still was pursued. The tempter, though baffled, gave not over, but addressed to him with new art and cunning, in hopes still to prevail. Full forty days was he under trial, sifted in every part, exposed to the horrors of the desert, to the necessity

of hunger: but neither the necessity of hunger, nor the horrors of darkness, nor the forty days temptation, could move him from his steadfast confidence and trust in God. And who was it, I beseech you, that was thus left exposed to these cruel trials and temptations? Was it not he whom God but just before had by a voice from Heaven declared to be *his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased?* And can you still think that your temptations are any signs that God has forsaken you, that he has at once withdrawn his spirit and his love from you? Can you think the continuance of your temptations any just ground for despair, when Christ himself was tempted forty days? For forty days without intermission was he tempted: how soon the temptation was again renewed, how frequent or how long the returns of it were, we cannot tell: but that the tempter still pursued him, and watched all the seasons and opportunities of approaching him with advantage, is plainly intimated by the Evangelist, in the 13th verse of this chapter; *and when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.* He departed, but, like an enemy that is rather enraged than subdued by his overthrow, he departed with resolutions to try his fortune again, and in his flight he meditated his return. Go, now, and complain, that your life is full of anxious care and trouble, that every day brings its trials with it, and every night its temptation; and much you fear that God has withdrawn his holy spirit from you, and no longer regards you with the watchful eye of a tender father, but has given you up to uncertain fears, to anguish and despair in this world, and to ruin inevitable in the next: but when you remember that through all these dangers and difficulties Christ has led the way, that he, like you, nay more than you, was tempted and exposed, you must blush at your complaints, and with confusion of face confess, that you have charged God foolishly, and with the holy Psalmist say, *it is mine own infirmity.*

Whatever you may think, there is more reason to suspect yourself, and even to fear concerning the love of God, when all things are calm and serene about you, and when you stand as it were exempted from the common burden of life, your body

body free from pain, and your mind from care. One would be apt to suspect that the enemy of mankind thought himself secure of you, and that there wanted no trials and temptations to urge on your approaching ruin: else why should he neglect you only, whilst with the greatest diligence and application he is exercising with tortures, both bodily and spiritual, all the rest of the sons of God? The best and the only thing we can say to this, is, that prosperity itself is the greatest of temptations, and the severest trial of virtue and innocence; and that the tempter leaves men to sink under the charms of plenty and indolence, as the surest method he can make use of. And if this be so, I am sure our ease and our plenty call upon us for the utmost diligence and care, for the constant exercise of all those virtues that are proper to our station. If we see others led to virtue by hardships and poverty; let us reflect that we want those tutors and guides, and that instead of them we have only charity and humility to follow: by the exercise of these we may reap the fruit of the others, and at last be found in the number of those who mourned with those who mourned.

If others struggle with temptations of divers kinds, and are perfected with trials, whilst we enjoy an inward peace and rest of soul, let us remember that we want the advantages they have. And since God has not called us to resist evil as he has called others, he certainly expects that we should do more good: it is their business to defend their virtue against the assaults of vice; but we, who enjoy a free and unmolested virtue, must improve it in a constant exercise and discharge of all the duties of piety and religion, in keeping a strict hand over our passions, that prosperity be not our ruin. If others are forced to serve constantly upon the guard and to watch against the encroachments of vice, and have work enough to secure an unblemished innocence; we, who are placed in the inmost and securest recesses of the Lord's vineyard, where no dangers can approach to molest and disturb our peace; we, I say, ought to labour the more zealously to till and improve the soil, that we may be able at the last to render a good account of the talent committed to our use.

2. It appears from the circumstances of this history of our Lord's temptations, that trials and temptations may be great and severe, where the gifts and graces of the spirit are administered in the largest proportion: and since those who are tempted may fall, for otherwise temptations would be no trials, it appears that those who have the gifts of the spirit, and grace sufficient, may nevertheless fall into sin through the power of temptations, and the want of care and diligence on their own part. It is a false comfort, therefore, which sinners administer to themselves, when they excuse their sins by laying all the blame upon their own natural infirmities, and the want of God's grace to enable them to do well. God is never wanting to those who are not wanting to themselves; and though he suffers all to be tempted, yet it is with this restriction upon the tempter, that he tempt them not above what they are able to bear. The instruction which I propose to you from this consideration is this, that whenever you are so unhappy as to offend, you do not try to palliate and excuse your offences, and charge God foolishly as if he had been wanting to your assistance; but that you rather consider your own iniquity as your own, and instead of excusing your sins, and administering thereby a false comfort to your soul, you labour through a timely repentance to correct and amend what is amiss, and endeavour to regain the true peace of mind, by reconciling yourselves to God, and by a speedy and resolute return to your duty.

In a word, it is no man's fault that he is tempted; it is the condition of our spiritual warfare; it is the combat to which God calls us for the proof and trial of our virtue. Then only are we guilty when we give way to temptations, and forsake God to follow the pleasures or the gains of wickedness. And whenever this is the case, there is but one remedy, repentance through faith in Christ Jesus, which will never be refused when it comes from a sincere heart, touched with a lively sense of God's goodness and its own unworthiness.

S E R M O N III.

On Self Examination.

PSALM XIX. 12.

Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me
from secret faults?

THE only method of coming to the distinct knowledge of our sins, and to a due sense of them, is self-examination; and therefore it is, that you are so frequently exhorted to enter into yourselves, to converse with your own hearts, and to search out the evil which is in them. But often it happens that this method, after the sincerest and most laborious inquiry, leaves men under great dissatisfaction of mind, and subject to the frequent returns of doubts and misgivings of heart; lest something very bad may have escaped their search, and, for want of being expiated by sorrow and repentance, should remain a debt upon their souls at the great day of account. As in temporal concerns, men often know, that by a long course of prodigality, and many expensive vanities, they have contracted a great debt upon their estates, and have brought themselves to the very brink of poverty and distress, and yet, when they try to think and consider of their condition, find themselves utterly unable to state their accounts, or to set forth the particulars of the debt they labour under; but the more they endeavour to recollect, the more they are convinced that they are mere strangers at home, and ignorant of their own affairs: so in spiritual concerns likewise, men who have been long acquainted with vice, and long strangers to thought and reflection, when they come to be sensible of the danger of their condition, and to set themselves seriously to repent, know in general that they have a heavy weight of sin and guilt upon their souls; but yet the particulars, though many and heinous, which they are able to recollect and charge themselves with distinctly, fall very short of the sense they have of their condition, and do by no means fill up that which they know to be the measure of their iniquities. And hence it is, that after the most careful examination of themselves, and the most solemn repentance for all their known sins, they do not always

enjoy that peace and tranquillity of soul which they expected, and had promised themselves, as the blessed fruits of contrition; but suffer extremely under uncertain hopes and fears, not being able to satisfy themselves that their repentance was perfect, which they know was formed upon a knowledge of their sins that was very imperfect.

The holy Psalmist had this sense of his condition, and felt how unable he was sufficiently to acknowledge his own guilt before God, when he broke forth into the complaint with which the text begins, *who can understand his errors?* or, as it runs in the translation which is more familiar to us, *who can tell how oft he offendeth?* In this distress his only refuge was to the mercy of God, confessing, with the greatest humility of heart, that his transgressions were not only more than he could bear, but even more than he could understand: *cleanse thou me from my secret faults.* Whenever men entertain doubts of their own sincerity and due performance of religious acts, it is extremely difficult to reason with their fears and scruples, and to dispossess them of the misapprehensions they have of their own state and condition. Such suggestions as bring ease and comfort to their minds come suspected, as proceeding from their own or their friends partiality; and they are afraid to hope, lest even to hope, in their deplorable condition, should prove to be presumption, and assuming to themselves more than in reason or justice belongs to them. But when we can shew them men of approved virtue and holiness, whose praise is in the book of life, who have struggled with the same fears, and waded through even the worst of their apprehensions to the peaceful fruits of righteousness; it helps to quicken both their spirits and their understanding, and is once to administer knowledge and consolation. And for this reason we can never sufficiently admire the wisdom of God, in setting before us the examples of good men in their lowest and most imperfect state. Had they been shewn to us only in the brightest part of their character, despair of attaining to their perfection might incline us to give over the pursuit, by throwing a damp upon our best resolutions: but when we see them rising in virtue and holiness from the same

retched condition which we are in, and labouring under the same difficulties, the same anxieties and torments of mind; when we see their very souls convulsed with the pangs of repentance, and their spirits almost sinking under the doubtfulness of their condition; when we hear them cry to God in the words of anguish, not knowing how to pray, or in what terms to lament their sins; when we see their nakedness of their souls, and find that they are like one of us, what secret comfort must it give to an afflicted spirit, that support to a mind oppressed with the sense of guilt, to find in these great examples what heavenly joy and peace often spring from the lowest depths of sorrow and woe!

And there is indeed, with respect to the comfort and security of a sinner, a great difference between arguments drawn from general reasonings and reflections, and those which are suggested from the experience and practice of holy men. In the case before us, if we consider the words of the text without regard had to the person who spoke them, we may draw many reflections from the great variety of human actions, and the complicated nature of them, from the short-sightedness of the understanding, and the weakness and imperfection of the faculties, to shew how very hard it is, and almost impossible, for any one perfectly to understand his errors: whence might we deduce the reasonableness of the petition, *cleanse thou me from secret faults*; because where we cannot in particular recollect, we can only in general lament, our iniquities: beyond this probability we cannot go to determine the method in which God will deal with sinners. But take the words as spoken by David, of the sincerity of his repentance, and the acceptance of it with God, we nothing doubt, and the conclusions will be much fuller, and such cannot fail to refresh the soul of every anguishing penitent; for in this view the words fairly afford us these two propositions:

- I. That the security and efficacy of repentance do not depend upon a particular recollection of all our errors.
- II. That for such errors as we cannot recollect, a general confession and repentance are full and sufficient.

These two propositions contain the plain doctrine of the text; so plain, that I need not spend your time in enlarging upon it. But that we may not mistake in the application of it to ourselves, and hope for forgiveness whilst we are willingly ignorant of our sins, and to save the trouble and pain of recollection, endeavour to cover them all under general ejaculations and petitions for mercy; I beg your patience, whilst I set before you of what kind and nature the sins are, which we may justly call our secret sins, and for the expiation of which a general confession and repentance will be accepted. And,

I. We may reckon among our secret sins those which our liturgy has taught us to ask repentance and forgiveness for, under the general names of negligences and ignorances. For neglect of our duty, and negligence in discharging it, are two things; the one arising from a dislike and aversion to the work, and attended with a consciousness and consent of mind; the other proceeding commonly from want of thought, or want of disposition, two infirmities which we care not to accuse ourselves of, and yet from which we are seldom free: insomuch that, when we think ourselves most secure of a good disposition and firm resolution to go through the business of our duty, they often forsake us in the midst of our work, and we find ourselves on a sudden becalmed, our inclinations grown faint and languid, and too sick of the employment to support us in the prosecution of it,

Such surprises good men have frequently complained of in their devotions: they set out with zeal and fervency of spirit, with eyes and hearts up-lifted to God, till some chance object diverts the eyes, some favourite care steals into the heart, and they both wander and are lost in the multiplicity of objects and imaginations which succeed each other; and when their thoughts return to the proper object, they are as one that awaketh from a dream. Offences of this kind are secret to us even whilst they are committing, the mind not being conscious to the delusion; and yet they are so frequent in every part of our duty, that when we call ourselves to the strictest account it is impossible to find their number, or to bring every single act to our remembrance.

2. Sins of ignorance are secret sins likewise, as the very name they are distinguished by imports. *Where there is no law*, says the Apostle, *there is no transgression*; and therefore unavoidable ignorance seems to be rather a misfortune than a crime; and though it be dumb, and cannot speak in its own defence, yet yet its very silence will be a stronger plea in the presence of the Almighty, than all the laboured excuses which the wit of knowing sinners has invented. In all cases where men may be said to offend through ignorance, they must be equally insensible of the crimes they commit, and the ignorance they labour under; and therefore equally incapable of repenting particularly of their sins, and of their ignorance. For when men venture boldly upon actions, being conscious to themselves that they know not whether they are going right or wrong, their sin is presumption, and not ignorance; and should they chance to blunder into the right way, it is much to be doubted, whether the happiness of their mistake will excuse the rashness of their attempts. Such repentance therefore as this must be numbered, not with our secret faults, but with such sins, as being acted with consciousness and consent, carry in them an avowed contempt of the majesty and authority of God: for if a man thinks virtue and vice so indifferent, that he may venture to chuse blindfold which to follow, there wants no better evidence, that his heart is not right with God, who can with so much coolness and temper affront his honour.

But though the ignorance itself be presumptuous, and is such as, being conscious to, we must certainly be accountable for; yet the mistakes, the follies, the sins it leads us to, may be unknown to us, both at the time of our offending, and of our repenting: and whatever aggravation they receive from the obstinate ignorance they proceed from, how much sorer the heinousness of them may deserve to be distinguished in our sorrow and contrition; yet, since the mind cannot reach the knowledge of them, they can only be lamented under the general character of secret sins. Nor is this the only case in which our sins partake of the malice of the will, and yet escape the notice of the understanding: for,

3. Nothing shews more the corruption

of the will, or disinclination of the heart to virtue, than confirmed customs and habits of sinning; and yet in this perfection of vice we lose the very sense and feeling of sin. Habits grow from often-repeated actions; and though at first they require distinct acts of the will to give them being, yet at last we grow so perfect, so ready at the work, as not to want the authority and consent of the mind: as servants, who, by being often told their masters' work, at last fall into the road of their business without being called on, and yet act as much under the direction of their masters' will as when they were under their daily or hourly instruction. And so it is in habits; the mind, which is the governing principle, lies by, and the work goes on without being attended to. Of many instances I give me leave only to mention one, which shall be that of common swearers, and blasphemers of the holy name: a vice in itself so prodigious, that no aggravation can heighten it, no excuse can lessen it; and yet those who are most guilty of this sin are least sensible of it: it is so familiar to them, that they are not conscious when they offend: blaspheming is their idiom, a turn in their way of speaking, and oaths the mere expletives of their language. And when every sober heart trembles to hear what they utter, they only are unconcerned, as only being ignorant of the accursed malice with which they defy the living God. For all these things God will call sinners into judgment; in his book they are noted down; but yet when sinners call themselves to judgment, they only can tell that they have grievously offended; the measure of their iniquity they know not, nor the many aggravations of it: and therefore the utmost that the sincerest penitent can do, is to lament the offences of his heart and tongue, which he is not able to remember, and to pray to God that he likewise will be pleased to blot out the remembrance of his iniquities.

4. The Apostle has advised us *not to be partakers of other men's sins*; which shews, that when others sin, being led to it by our influence, example, or encouragement, we share with them in the guilt of their iniquity. How far our influence spreads, to what instances, and what degrees of vice, how many we are led by our example, or hardened by

encouragement, is more than we can tell, and yet not more than we shall answer for. Those who are thus entered into our service, and sin under our contract, are but our factors; they trade for us, as well as for themselves; and whatever their earnings are, we shall receive our due proportion out of the wages of their sin. This is a guilt which steals upon us without being perceived: it grows whilst we sleep, and is loading our account even when our bodies are in the possession of the grave. The higher our station, and the greater our authority, the more reason have we to fear being involved in this kind of guilt; because in proportion to our authority will the infection of our example spread; and, as our power is great, our encouragement will be the more effectual; and some perhaps there may be, who shall appear not only for their own sins, but for the wickedness of the age they lived in. But then, on the other side (pardon me a small digression), power, and honour, and riches, are great means of salvation in the hands of a wise man, who knows how to use them to the glory of God, and the good of mankind. To him shall be added the virtue and religion which grow up under his influence and protection: and how transporting will the surprise be to such happy souls, when they shall find the improvement of this and future ages in religious holiness traced to their account at the great day, as being the genuine offspring of their care and solicitude, and unshaken fidelity in the cause of God, and of his Christ!

5. The great measure of folly and vanity and self-love there is in the best of our actions is what seldom falls under our notice; and yet from such secret errors who is free? We hardly know our own hearts well enough to answer at all times for the integrity of our intentions. How much of our virtue and religion is mere respect to common decency, and arises from no higher spring than a regard to our own credit and reputation, is more than we can certainly tell. When we are most eager in pursuit of some good end, should we stop short, and examine ourselves fairly, we should find perhaps that we were only gratifying some private passion, and that none of the best, perhaps malice and revenge, or some other inordinate desire.

To this account we may add the many vain imaginations which are conceived in the heart, though never brought to life by action, but die in the womb, and are out of remembrance. Such are the ambitious man's imaginary scenes of honour and glory, formed and wrought up to a kind of life in a mere delusion of thought; which, fantastical as they are in themselves, do arise from real pride and vanity. Such the visionary enjoyment of sensual men, when the thoughts traverse all the forbidden paths of luxury and wantonness; where, though the phantom be airy and bodiless, yet does this dream of sensuality derive itself from no imaginary corruption, but from a real distemper in the mind, from inordinate desires and affections. Such is the secret anger, such the malice of the heart, which sits brooding over envious or revengeful designs, which it contrives within itself, and seems to execute upon its enemies; and, for want of power or opportunity for real revenge, feeds itself with viewing the execution of its wrath, though only expressed in the images of fancy. Harmless and innocent as this revenge may seem, which spends itself in imaginary mischief only, yet it springs from the root of bitterness, and is too plain an evidence that we hate one another.

Lastly, When we come to repent of our sins, many of them may be secret to us merely through the weakness and imperfection of the memory, which cannot recollect all the various passages of a vicious life. These sins, however conscious we have been of them heretofore, with respect to our repentance are as secret as if we had never known them, and can only be confessed and bewailed in general terms.

Thus have I set before you the several kinds of our secret sins. One general character there is which belongs to them all, namely, that they are such as we cannot, not such as we will not remember: for though the mercy of God will cover our defects, when they are unavoidable, and such as arise from our natural weakness and infirmity; yet we have no reason to expect any allowance, where we are wanting to ourselves through laziness and indisposition; where, to avoid the trouble or the anguish of repentance, we cover our own sins deceit-

fully. Such hypocrisy will be no plea in his presence, *who trieth the heart and reins, and spieth out all our ways.* But,

II. We are to consider what guilt we contract by our secret sins, lest it should be thought that the sins which escape our knowledge ought not to burden our conscience. Where there is no guilt, there needs no remission; and if we cannot in justice be charged with our secret sins, there is no sense in the Psalmist's petition, *cleanse thou me from secret faults.* In another place he has told us, *that God sets our iniquities before him, and our secret sins in the light of his countenance:* and the day approaches, when *for all these things he will call us into judgment.*

In the instances already set before you, you may observe, that our most secret sins are sometimes the most heinous. Thus it is in the case of habitual sins; we are too well acquainted with them to take particular notice of them; they are the involuntary motions of a second nature, and we are as little concerned to count their number, as we are the beatings of our pulse. But shall this plead their excuse? Shall only fearful sinners and modest beginners be punished? And shall the height of iniquity, because it takes away all shame and sense of sin, take away likewise all danger of judgment? This can agree with no rule of justice or equity; for by this means the same man will stand chargeable with the guilt of his early sins, such as he committed before his conscience was quite hardened, and yet not accountable for the more enormous crimes of sinful wickedness: as if the only sin we could commit, were to be sensible of our faults.

The same might be made appear in the other instances; for every idle word, how soon soever it slips out of our memory, for every vain imagination of the heart, how soon soever it vanishes away, we shall *give an account at the day of judgment.* For the guilt of sin does not arise from the power of our memory, nor is it extinguished by the weakness of it; if it were, forgetfulness would be the surest repentance; and want of thought and reflection, which is so often represented in scripture as an aggravation of sin, would be the sinner's best security. But, alas! though we forget, there is one who cannot, before whom our iniquities are ever present; who will enter into judgment

with us, as well for the sins which we cannot remember as for those we cannot forget.

The consequence from the whole is this: that since many of our sins are secret to us, they can only be repented of in general; and since many of our secret sins are very heinous, they must seriously and solemnly be repented of. By general repentance then you are not to understand a slight or superficial repentance only. The petition of the Psalmist, *cleanse thou me from secret faults,* proceeded from a heart deeply affected with a sense of its guilt, and does not express the sentiments of one who was excusing or lessening his faults; for he remembered, and so must we, that secret as our faults are, yet God has placed them *in the light of his countenance.*

S E R M O N IV.

Irreligion a frequent Attendant on great Riches.

LUKE, xii. 21.

So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.

THE riches of the world being often the fruits of injustice and oppression, one wealthy man's estate being raised perhaps upon the ruin and poverty of hundreds, and built upon the tears and cries of widows and orphans; and yet being sometimes represented in Scripture as the blessing of God upon the honest labour and industry of men diligent in their calling or profession; or as the reward bestowed upon a virtuous contentment, and resignation of mind to the providence of the Almighty: a great fortune being often used to very ill purposes, to the increase of luxury and wantonness, to the encouragement of vice, and to the mischief of all who are the unhappy neighbours of an over-grown rich man; and yet being in itself applicable to the best uses in the world, to the promotion of virtue and holiness, to the advancement of the honour of God, and to the setting forward the common good and happiness of mankind: there being such different ways both of getting and enjoying the riches of the world, the possession of them has been either valued

or despised, condemned or approved by moralists and divines, according to the view they have had of them with relation to the several methods by which they are obtained and employed. *The hand of the diligent, saith Solomon, maketh rich: and again, the blessing of the Lord it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it; yet at other times he observed riches that had no blessing in them; There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.*

From this observation I think all disputes about riches may be reconciled: where they are ill got, or ill used, they are an hurt to the owner; where they are honestly got, and worthily enjoyed, they are a blessing to the owner, and through his means to many others. Thus far the case is plain: but then it is a matter of further consideration, to see what the iniquity is that generally follows a large possession. The rich man's crimes are commonly considered under the head of profuseness or covetousness: to the first are referred luxury, intemperance, and all the sins of pleasure which wealth furnishes and supports: to the second head are reduced fraud, oppression, want of kindness and charity, and all the iniquity that attends the unreasonable desire of getting or preserving an estate. All these indeed are very great and too common faults among rich men: but there is still a more secret iniquity that sticks close to great possessions, and which does not always discover itself in the ill effects before-mentioned: a man may have an estate honestly gotten, and in the eye of the world he may use it in all respects as he ought, and yet still be a very wicked rich man. What, you will say, although he be free from covetousness, given to hospitality, and liberal to the poor? If these things will not preserve riches from the contagion of guilt, what will? But before you judge too hastily in this cause, you must consider that virtue does not consist merely in the outward act; it is not the material action that denominates a man good or bad, but the judgment in this case must regard the principle from whence the actions flow. A prodigal man squanders his money without regard, or distinction of persons or occasion: where tenderness and good-nature attend upon this vice, the poor and miserable

often gather largely of the prodigal man's scatterings: but will you call this Christian charity, where perhaps the duty owing to God was never once thought on, and of all that was given, not one farthing offered as tribute to the great Giver of every good gift; but the fountain head was corrupt, though the stream indeed flowed in no ill channel?

If we consider the parable of the rich man, of which the words of the text are the moral or application, we shall discover what particular evil in riches our Saviour pointed at, and designed to correct by the instruction of this parable. The story is this: *The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said this will I do: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided? After which follow the words of the text, So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.*

The first thing to be inquired into is the true drift and meaning of this parable. In the fifteenth verse of this chapter our Lord warns his hearers to *beware of covetousness*: in this parable he represents the foolish rich man enlarging his barns, that he might heap up his goods in store: in the text he warns us of the danger of laying up treasures for ourselves, whilst we neglect being rich towards God: and in the thirty-third verse he exhorts us to *sell that we have, and give alms: to provide for ourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.* From these circumstances it is commonly understood, that covetousness was the rich man's crime; that enlarging his barns to receive his plentiful crop was the instance and proof of it; and that the only way to be rich towards God is to sell our goods, and to distribute them in works of charity and mercy: thus this parable is commonly understood, but I think not rightly. Our Saviour, it is true, introduces this parable in consequence

quence of the caution he had given against covetousness: but he had before given a reason against covetousness, *For a man's life* (says he) *consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*: and the parable was added to illustrate this reason given against covetousness, and not to display the folly or vice of covetousness in general: the rich man is not described in the colours of a covetous man; his wealth arose from no oppression or usury, it was the product of his own land, which has always been esteemed as honest a way of being rich, and to proceed as much from the immediate blessing of God, as any whatever: the ground was his own; he is not said to withhold from the rightful possessor by violence or by fraud. Thus far then there is no mark of covetousness, or of any other fault: but when he found his crop to be great, he enlarged his barns; and this perhaps was his crime. But where was the iniquity of this? Does not every man endeavour that his barns should be in proportion to the product of his land? May not the most charitable man in the world have a barn, or build a barn large enough to receive his crop, and yet be guiltless? Nay, it is evident from hence, that covetousness, properly so called, was not his fault; for he built his barn to lay up stores for many years, proposing rest and satisfaction in the goods already gotten, and intending to trouble himself no further about wealth; he had enough. A covetous man would rather have turned his goods into money, and put it to usury, and slaved on still for more: besides, in the twentieth verse, where God is brought in reproving the rich man for his folly, there is not one word said of his building large barns to receive his fruits: *Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee*. But if the large barn had been the crime, the consistency of the parable requires, that the reproof should have pointed to the crime, and it should have been said, *Thou fool, this night shall the lightning from heaven consume thy large barns, or something to this purpose*. Further, neither upon this is it rightly concluded from the circumstances of the parable, that this rich man was void of charity to the poor: he is represented as fully satisfied in his abundance: there had been much more reason to have thought him uncharitable,

had he been represented as not contented with his abundance, but still fearful of poverty and want; which is often the case, and the pretence of the rich uncharitable man. Nor, lastly, is it reasonable to limit and confine the notion of being rich towards God to works of charity only; all good works in proportion make us rich towards God. St. Paul speaks in general of the richness of good works, and St. James of the richness of faith; and in the text, to be rich to God does particularly signify, to trust and rely upon his providence for our life and support, in opposition to relying on treasures of our own heaping up, or large barns of our own building and filling; as I shall shew presently.

Having thus far examined the common interpretation of the parable, and shewn how much short it falls of our Saviour's true aim and intent, I shall now endeavour to point out the true meaning of it, which will lead us into the right sense and understanding of the text.

When our Saviour exhorted his hearers to beware of covetousness, he supported his advice with this reason, *For a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*: this reason he illustrates and confirms in the following parable. The aim then of the parable is to shew, that wealth is no security, that it is folly to pretend to arm ourselves against the accidents or casualties of life by heaping up treasures, which nothing can protect us against but the good providence and care of our heavenly Father. In this point all the circumstances of the parable meet; the rich man is represented as flowing in plenty, so that he was necessitated to pull down his barns and storehouses in order to enlarge them: this plenty made him forget God, and vainly imagine that he had a security in his own hands against all the calamities of life: his riches made him promise himself many happy days and years: in which confidence he thus expresses himself, *Soul thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry*. This folly God reproves him for, and checks him in his presumptuous security: *Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall thy things be which thou hast provided?* Thou shalt die, and what then must become of those mighty pledges of thy security?

So little will they avail thee, that they themselves will fall under the power of another, never to return to thee again. *So is he, says our Lord, who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.* These words being the moral of this parable, must be expounded so as to answer the design of the parable; and therefore to lay up treasures for ourselves must signify to lay up treasures for our own security, as if we meant to become thereby the carvers of our own fortune: consequently, to be rich towards God, being placed in opposition to laying up treasures for ourselves, must denote our placing our confidence and trust in him, our endeavouring to procure his favour and protection, as knowing that in them only is all our hope and stability.

From this representation it is easily collected what is the dangerous circumstance attending riches, which makes them often prove so fatal to their owners, namely, that they beget an irreligious confidence and presumption in the heart of man, inclining him to forget God, who formed him. A sense and feeling of want is a constant remembrance of our dependence, and is ever calling upon us to look up to him, upon whose mercy and goodness we exist. A life spent in these difficulties, and supported beyond all the reasonable hopes of narrow circumstances, suggests to us every moment how wonderfully God has brought us on our way, when we had neither staff, nor shoes, nor money, in our scrip: these are the natural thoughts and suggestions of poverty. But a man who lives in the midst of plenty, and fears no want, is not apt to think often of the need he has to be assisted. He that remembers nothing, but that his large estate has ever supplied both his necessities and superfluities, will hardly reflect further, so as to come to an acknowledgment that God has been his stay ever since he fell from his mother's womb. This is the common case of riches: they steal the heart from God, and render it insensible to the duties of religion, by taking away the foundation of all religion, the sense of our dependence on the providence and care of Heaven. This made our Lord cry out, *How hardly shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of heaven!* This insolence, this pride of mind, which is the proper growth of the rich man's soil,

choaks all the seeds of virtue and holiness, and leaves no room for the plants planted by our heavenly Father to thrive and prosper: even charity itself, the choicest flower of a rich garden, flies the neighbourhood of this poisonous weed, and will not take root by it.

It is this irreligiousness of mind, this disregard to God and every thing that is good, which are the too common companions of a plentiful fortune, that have made riches to be so hardly spoken of in Scripture. If you examine particular places, you will find regard is still had to this corruption of mind. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, it is not easy to find upon what account the rich man was condemned, as the case is generally supposed to be stated: the rich man is said to be *clothed in purple and fine linen, and to fare sumptuously every day.* He was not covetous, it seems; he lived answerably to his fortune: his life is represented as a scene of ease and pleasure, but is not taxed with any notable vice or enormity: he is said to fare sumptuously, which I take to be a description of his state and grandeur, rather than an imputation of any vice; for he is not accused either of gluttony or drunkenness. But was he not, you will say, uncharitable? for poor Lazarus lay at his door, *desiring the crumbs that fell from his table.* This circumstance rather shews, that the poor used to be fed at his door. Had the intent of the parable been to have represented this rich man as hard to the poor, it would have been said, that his servant drove away the poor from the door; or, at least, when the poor came, that they were sent empty away: neither of which is said; but Lazarus is represented as feeding upon the crumbs of the rich man's table. And this is the image given of their different conditions in this world: the rich man sat down to a sumptuous table; the poor man was glad to feed upon the crumbs and scraps that fell from it. The end of these men is well known: Lazarus was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom; the rich man was tormented in hell flames. What then does the parable teach us? Why it represents to us the dangerous state of great men, who live without the fear or love of God in their hearts; and the much happier condition of the poor, who have their share of misery in this world, which often

often leads to glory and immortality hereafter. If you look forward, you will see this is the true aim of the parable: when the rich man applies to Abraham for relief, and finds none; he then petitions for his brethren, that they might be warned against the danger that hung over their heads, against coming into the same sad state with himself. Here you may well imagine that he would desire they should be particularly warned against those crimes which had proved his ruin. Had he burnt in the flames for intemperance or uncharitableness, he would have begged that his brethren might have been exhorted to fly the sins that were his tormentors: but of this nothing is said: he only desires that Lazarus might go, in quality of a Prophet, to testify the truth and reality of a future state; which plainly shews that his condemnation was the effect of irreligion and unbelief: he lived at ease, and God was not in all his thoughts. To his request Abraham replies, *They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them*: shewing us again, that the fault of these rich men was contempt of the Prophets, and irreligion. The rich man tacitly owns this contempt, both for himself and his brethren, by saying, *Nay, but if one went from the dead, they will repent*: which was confessing, that they had not reverence enough for Moses and the Prophets to repent upon their authority and admonition, but wanted some greater motive, which he thought might be found in the appearance of one coming from the grave. From these circumstances it is evident, that the purport of the parable is not to represent to us the heinousness of any one particular crime for which the rich man suffered; but to shew how fatally riches influence the mind to irreligion, and make men forget God; whilst the poor, living in continual want, have a perpetual sense of their dependence, and do in all their distress look up to him of whom cometh their salvation. This sense of dependence creates in the poor man a fear to offend, a desire to please; whilst the rich man, wanting, as he thinks, nothing from God, has no desire to court his favour; but grows negligent and remiss in all the parts of religion, from which it is a very easy step to infidelity.

It is from these considerations that the

love of the world is said in Scripture to be *enmity with God*. All vices are not attended with hatred and contempt of God; not all the vices that are commonly ascribed to riches; and therefore the *love of the world*, that is *enmity with God*, is not to be expounded by covetousness or uncharitableness, or any other particular vice, but denotes the rich man's temper and disposition, the habit of mind that grows out of a plentiful estate; and this indeed is very commonly *enmity with God*; inclining men not only to disobey his commands, but, as far as lies in them, to throw him out of the world, and depose him from the throne of heaven.

To the same purpose our Lord speaks, when he tells us, *No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other: ye cannot serve God and Mammon*. Here our Lord speaks without a parable, and tells us plainly what it is that makes wealth to be so dangerous a possession; namely, because it is the rival of God; and if it once get possession of the mind, it will expel all trust and confidence in God, all regard to faith and religion: *for ye cannot serve God and Mammon*.

From what has been discoursed upon this subject, we may learn where a rich man ought to place his guard: if he is not covetous or uncharitable, if he is not luxurious and intemperate, so far it is well: but, above all, let him take heed, that the pride and insolence of mind, too common in plentiful circumstances, grow not upon him; the pride I mean of self-sufficiency; as if he were able to guide and to guard himself through the world, and had not so much need of the care of God over him, as the poor who enjoy nothing: let him learn to know, that in riches are no security; and that he wants the protection of heaven as much as the poorest wretch in the world. A rich man, that has this sense as he ought to have, will in consequence have the other virtues proper to his state: he will be gentle, affable, kind, and charitable; and his spirit, in the height of fortune, will be adorned with the meekness of the Gospel of Christ. A man of sense need not go far to learn this submission to God in the highest fortune: our Saviour's argument, that follows close after the text, will teach him

in the reasonableness of the duty: *The life, says he, is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.* The utmost riches can do, upon the largest concessions made to them, is to provide food and raiment, and such like necessities and conveniences of life. Put the case then, that by being master of a great estate, you are master of food and raiment, and can have them in what quantity or quality you please: What then? Have you less reason, upon this account, to depend upon God, and to implore his aid? Consider a little: To what purpose serves food? Is it not for the support of life? But can food ward off death? Are you, in all your plenty of provisions, one jot securer against sickness, or any accident that may rob you of your life, than the poorest man? Will not a tile from an house kill a rich man as well as a beggar? If this be the case, is it not very absurd to plume yourself, and to think of security, because of your plenty, when life itself, which is more than meat, is still exposed; and for which you can have no security, but in the goodness of God? You have many changes of raiment, and the poor has only rags. What then? Will the gout, or stone, or burning fever, pay such respect to fine clothes as not to approach them? Will health always attend upon gold lace and embroidery? If it will, you are right to multiply garments: but if, after all your care for raiment, you must still depend upon God, as well as the beggar, for health and strength of body, how ridiculous is the joy over many changes of garments! *Is not the body more than raiment?* Since then you must trust God for your life and strength, because they are things which no care of your own, no degree of wealth can insure; had you not even as good trust him a little farther, and ease yourself of this unreasonable care for the things of life? From these, and the like considerations, you may see, that dependence upon God is as much the rich man's duty and interest as it is the poor man's: that to trust God, and to rely on his goodness, is to be rich towards God; and is that sort of riches which will make us easy and happy in this life, and glorious and ever blessed in that which is to come. By these means we may still enjoy our fortunes; and, as our Church has taught

us to pray, "We may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal."

SERMON V.

The Danger of trusting to a Death-bed Repentance.

MATTH. XXVII. 38.

Then were there two thieves crucified with him; one on the right hand, and another on the left.

WHAT different effects the judgments of God have upon the minds of men, may be learned from these examples now before us. Here are two thieves crucified with our blessed Saviour; two who were probably guilty of the same crimes, and now under the same condemnation; both brought by the providence of God to suffer in the company of his own Son, whose blood was shed for the sins of the whole world. But mark the end of these men: one died reproaching and blaspheming Christ, and breathed out his soul in the agonies of guilt and despair; the other saw, acknowledged, and openly confessed his Redeemer, and expired with the sound of those blessed words in his ears, *to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.*

How adorable is the wisdom of God, who has thus instructed us; and by setting the examples of his justice and mercy so near together, has taught us to fear without despair, and to hope without presumption! Who would not tremble for himself, when he sees the man perish in his sins who died by his Saviour's side; within reach of that blood which was poured out for his redemption, but wanting faith to stretch out his hand and be saved?

What would the dying sinner give to have his Saviour so near him in his last moments, that he might pour out his soul before him, and seize by violence the hand which alone is able to save? Yet he who had all these advantages enjoyed none of them; but died in his sins, void of hope and of comfort.

Must the sinner then despair, and has God forgot to be merciful? No: cast your eyes on the other side of the cross, and there you may see the mercy of God displayed in the brightest colours. There hangs

hangs the penitent surrounded with all the terrors of approaching death: yet in the midst of all, calm and serene, confessing his sins, glorifying the justice of God in his own punishment, rebuking the blasphemy of his companion, justifying the innocence of his Saviour, and adoring him even in the lowest state of misery; and at last receiving the certain promise of a blessed immortality.

Thus the case stands with all the allowances made to it which seem most to favour a death-bed repentance: and yet, as if the Scripture had said nothing of the wretch who died blaspheming and reproaching Christ, nor given us any cause to fear that a wicked life may end in an hardened and obdurate death; the case of the penitent only is drawn into example, and such hopes are built on it, as are neither consistent with the laws of God, nor the terms of man's salvation; for even of this example the most preposterous and absurd use is made. This penitent, as soon as he came to the knowledge of Christ, repented of his sins: if you are fond of the example, go and do likewise: if you delay, and pursue the pleasures of sin, upon the encouragement which this instance affords you, it is plain that you like nothing in the repentance, but only the lateness of it; and that your inclinations are to imitate the thief, rather than the penitent Christian. Once he lived by violence, in defiance of the laws of God and man: when he was penitent, he abhorred and detested his iniquities: which part would you imitate? If both, if like him, you propose to enjoy the pleasures of sin, and like him to repent and enjoy the pleasures of heaven, you mightily impose on yourself; his case can never be yours, and therefore his example cannot be your security. Besides, were the case indeed parallel to that of the dying Christian, yet still it can afford no certain hope; since the proof is as strong from the case of the impenitent thief, that you shall die in your sins; as it can be from the other case, that you shall repent of them.

It would take up too much of your time to consider this case distinctly in all its views: I shall therefore only briefly hint to you the circumstances which distinguish it from that of the dying Christian; and then proceed to shew, what little hope this example affords, allowing

the case to be what it is generally supposed to be.

First, then, In all this perhaps there may be nothing resembling a death-bed repentance. It is no uncommon thing for malefactors to lie in prison a long time before they are brought to trial and execution; and if that is the present case, there is room enough for the conversion of this criminal before he came to suffer. The circumstances incline this way. How came he to be so well acquainted with the innocence of Christ, if he never heard of him till he met him on the cross? How came it into his head to address him in the manner he does, *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom?* What were the marks of royalty that were to be discovered on the cross? What the signs of dignity and power? What could lead him to think that his fellow-sufferer had a title to any kingdom? What to imagine, that he was Lord of the world that is to come? These circumstances make it probable that he had elsewhere learned the character and dignity of Christ, and came persuaded of the truth of his mission: and what is this to them, who have no desire to lie down Christians upon their death-bed, though they would willingly go off penitents?

Secondly, Suppose this great work were begun and finished on the cross; yet it cannot be drawn into example by Christian sinners; because the conversion of a Jew or an Heathen is one thing, and the repentance of a Christian is another. The promises of God, through Christ, are so far certain, that whenever an unbeliever repents and is converted, his sins shall be forgiven. This was the penitent's case; and therefore the pardon granted to him answers directly to baptismal regeneration; and has nothing to do with a death-bed repentance, nor can at all affect them who have fallen from grace once received. For,

Thirdly, The profligate life of this unconverted sinner was not attended with such aggravating circumstances as the sins of Christians are. He sinned against the light of nature, and the common rules of reason and morality; but it might at least be said for him, that he was the unhappy son of an unhappy father, conceived in the degenerate and corrupted state of nature; that he wanted both the sense and knowledge, the hopes
and

and fears, and the helps and assistances, which the Gospel affords for destroying the power and dominion of sin; and the greater his weakness was, the fitter object of mercy was he; and because he had not been freed by grace from the power of sin, he had the better plea to be freed by mercy from punishment. But are there the same excuses, or the same hopes of pardon for Christians, who sin against knowledge, against the powerful motives of hope and fear, and in despite of the holy spirit with which they were sealed? To sin in hopes of pardon, and upon the prospect of future repentance, is itself a great aggravation of sin, and a sad abuse of the mercy of God.

If the Heathen sins, he sins under those infirmities of nature for which Christ died; but the Christian sins under the use of all the remedies which the Gospel has provided, and which were purchased for him by his dying Saviour. The condition of mankind after the fall afforded, without doubt, many arguments of pity and compassion; and such arguments as moved the Son of God to undertake their redemption. The ignorant, the unenlightened sinner, has right to plead all these arguments in his own behalf: his is the common cause of mankind; and nature, with unutterable groans, cries for him and all her children before her great Creator.

If the penitent received the first knowledge of Christ upon the cross; yet how much more had he to say for himself, than the Christian, who comes to make his peace at the hour of death? He might thus plead his unhappy cause: "Lord, I am one of those sinners, for whom thy Son now expires upon the cross: I was conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity; I have wandered in ignorance and darkness, without the light of thy Gospel to direct me, without the help of thy spirit to protect me: why was all my life so dark, and these few last minutes only blessed with the knowledge of thy Son? Lord, accept the poor remains of life, since it is all I have left to offer; my latest breath shall confess my own guilt, and my Saviour's innocence: and since thy wisdom has united me to him in this cross, let me never more part from him; but as

"I am joined with him in his death, so let me be likewise in his life for ever more." But what shall the dying Christian say after an hardened life of sin and impenitence? What words shall we put in his mouth to appease the anger of his injured Redeemer? You may spend your time in lamenting your past folly, but with what language will you approach to God? You have neither ignorance nor weakness to plead; you were enlightened with his word; and his holy spirit was ever ready to assist you, had you been ready to endeavour after holiness. What will you then say, when, frightened and amazed, you call for mercy at your last moments? May not the Lord then say, "How long have I waited in vain for these prayers and these sighs? How have I spoken to you by your conscience within, and by the ministry of my word from without; and how have my calls been despised? The gates of mercy were always open to you, but you shut them against yourself; but though you could fly from the mercy of God, yet his justice will overtake you." Consider but this calmly with yourselves, and you will find that the wicked Christian's case is so much worse than the penitent's upon the cross, that there can be no reason for you to encourage yourselves upon this example; or to hope for the same mercy, when your case will be greatly different. These are such circumstances as enter into the nature of the case, and will make it always unfit, and oftentimes impossible, to be imitated by a Christian. But there are other circumstances fit to be observed, which render a death-bed repentance very insecure and dangerous, though we should allow it all the hopes which have been raised from the case before us.

As, first; He that sins, in hopes of repenting at last, may sin so far, as to grow hardened and obdurate, and incapable of repentance when the time comes. This reflection is grounded upon the case of the impenitent thief, who was crucified with our Saviour; who, though he had certainly all the outward advantages which the penitent had, yet he made no step towards repentance, but died reproaching Christ, and joining with those who crucified him, in that bitter jeer, *If thou be the Christ, come down from the cross.* Or, if you want more evidence, this

this example may be backed by many more in our own time; it being no uncommon thing to see malefactors die stupid and senseless, and go out of the world as wickedly as they have lived in it: and what can this be attributed to but to the desertion of God's holy spirit, which will not always strive with sinners, but sometimes leaves them to perish in the hardness of their hearts? So that the man who sins in hopes of repenting, can never be sure of this last retreat; because, by pursuing the first part of his design, that is, to enjoy the pleasure of sin, he may soon grow incapable of the last, which is repenting. I question not but those who reserve themselves to these last hopes of repenting mean sincerely to do it when the time comes; for hardly can I think, that any man means to suffer for his sins: but then those who enter upon sin with these tender regards to their own souls, soon grow above such mean thoughts, and would scorn to own themselves in the number of those who are candidates for repentance: they contract a familiarity with sin, and, with Solomon's fools, learn to make a mock of it, till by degrees their consciences are hardened, and not to be touched by those soft impressions which at the first setting out they felt from the languishing remains of grace. And from hence it comes to pass, that when these sinners lie down upon a sick bed, they often want both the will and the power to ask forgiveness; and, by an habitual neglect of all parts of religion, become unable to perform any, even that in which all their poor hopes are concluded, to repent of, and ask pardon for, their sins. Nor is it in your own power to sin to what degree you please, or to preserve a sense of religion, amidst the pleasures of iniquity: if it were, possibly the danger in this respect might be less: but habits grow insensibly; there is a kind of mechanism in it, as in the growth of the body; and he that gives himself up to sin can no more resolve how great a sinner he will be, than he that is born a man can resolve how tall, or how short, of stature, he will be. To the truth of this, experience daily witnesses; happy are those who want this fatal experience! With how much pain and uneasiness do men bring themselves to do the things, which in a little time they glory and take pride

in, or at least grow easy and contented under? And thus the man, who with great tremblings of heart, and misgivings of mind, brings himself to taste the pleasures of sin, with resolutions of an after repentance, comes at last to be so well reconciled to his sins, as not to think repentance necessary for them. The moment you give yourself up to sin, you give yourself out of your own power; you lay the chains upon the neck of reason, and set the passions free: conscience, which used to be your advance guard, and give you early notice of every approaching evil, falls into the power of lust and affection: and when reason and conscience are destroyed, the triple cord is broken, and religion must soon follow after; and how, in this general rout, one poor resolution, to repent of all this iniquity, should escape, is more than can be easily conceived: and yet when you lose that, you lose yourself; it is your last, your only hope. Upon the whole, there is much more reason to fear, that sin, if once you indulge it, should get the better of and destroy your resolution of repentance, than that your resolution to repent should ever conquer and destroy the confirmed powers and habits of sin: and I wish those who have not yet put it out of their own power to reason calmly upon these things, would enter into this debate with their own hearts, and consider what danger they are in; a few moments cannot be too much to spend in so weighty an affair: and whenever you retire to these cool thoughts, may the Father of mercies influence those moments of your life, upon which all eternity depends!

But, secondly, Could you preserve your resolutions of repentance, yet still it is not in your own power to secure an opportunity to execute them. The thief upon the cross died a violent death by the hand of justice; happy in this at least, that he knew how long he had to live; and had no ground to flatter himself with the hopes of many years to come. He had no pretence to defer his repentance in prospect of a farther opportunity: nor was his heart to be allured by the soft and entertaining pleasures of life, when life itself was so near expiring. From the like death God defend us all! And yet, without it, which of us can hope for such favourable circumstances for repentance? Whenever the sinner thinks

thinks of repentance, he will find that he has a work of great sorrow and trouble upon his hands; and this will make him unwilling to set about it. No man is so old, but that he thinks he may last out one year more; and then, Why will not to-morrow serve for repentance as well as to day? And thus the great work is delayed, till sickness or natural infirmities render him incapable of it. It was the sight of this strange delusion in which men live, still promising themselves longer life, and upon those hopes deferring the necessary work of eternity, which made the holy Psalmist break forth into that moving petition: *So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.* The way that men generally number their days can produce nothing but folly and wickedness: the many years to come, which they rejoice in, serve only to make them careless and negligent, and thoughtless of the great concerns of immortality: and whether men are not deluded by these hopes, let any one judge. Do but suppose that you were in the thief's case, and certainly to die upon a fixed day; do you not think that you should have other thoughts, other concerns, about you? Could you then delay your repentance, and say, to-morrow will be time enough? If you would not do it then, why will you do it now? Only for this reason, that you think you have time enough in reserve to do this work hereafter. And so you may continue to think with as much reason, as you do now, till death, or the sickness which leads to it, surprises you. And hence it comes to pass, that very few, who sin with resolutions of repentance, ever think of it till they are confined to a sick bed; because, as long as they are in health, they have always this answer ready, it will be time enough hereafter. So that the unfortunate end, to which justice brought this penitent upon the cross, was, with respect to his conversion, an advantage that few Christians will give themselves: the certainty of his death made his repentance certain, permitted him no delays, no excuses, no flattering hopes of better opportunities hereafter.

Thirdly, Considering that Christians, who propose to themselves this example of the thief upon the cross, seldom repent till they are warned by sickness to pre-

pare for death; they will evidently want another advantage which this penitent had. His death not being the effect of any bodily pain or distemper, but of the judge's sentence, he brought with him to the cross, which, if you please, you may call his death-bed; a sound body and mind. He had his senses perfect, his reason fresh and undisturbed; and was capable of performing such acts of faith and devotion, as were necessary to his repentance and conversion. But how different often is the case of the sick and languishing sinner? Perhaps he labours under such acute pains as will give him no respite for thought or reflection; or perhaps he dozes, and lies stupid, without knowing his friends and relations, or even himself; or perhaps the distemper seizes his head, and he raves and is distracted; loses his sense and reason, and every thing of the man, but the outward shape, before his death. And are not these hopeful circumstances for repentance? Is a man likely to know and find out his Saviour, when he knows not even his own brother who stands by his bedside? These are very common circumstances, and such as render repentance impracticable. But should the sinner escape all these accidents, and go off gently without being forsaken by his sense or reason; yet still it may happen, and often it does, that his promised repentance produces nothing but horror and despair. In his life-time he flattered himself with unreasonable hopes of mercy, and now he begins to see how unreasonable they were: now he can think of nothing, but that he is going to appear before his Judge, to receive the just rewards of wickedness: he sees him already clothed with wrath and majesty; and forms, within his own tormented breast, the whole process of the last day. If he sleeps, he dreams of judgment and misery; and when he wakes, believes his dreams forebode his fate. Thus restless and uneasy, thus void of comfort and hope, without confidence to ask pardon, without faith to receive it, does the wretched sinner expire, and has the misfortune to see his hopes die before him. In a word then, put all the favourable circumstances together that you can imagine; bring the sinner by the gentlest decays of nature to his latter end; give him the fairest and longest

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warning;

warning; yet still you give him no security: if he is not sensible of his sin and impenitence, he will die, like the wicked thief upon the cross, reproaching Christ, hardened and obdurate against the thoughts of judgment: or, if he comes to a sense, and sees his own unworthiness, how shall he be preserved from despair, and such a dread of his righteous Judge, as will make him neither fit to live, nor fit to die? Nothing but an extraordinary degree of grace can preserve him in a temper fit for repentance, free on one side from confidence and presumption, on the other from slavish fear which casts out love, which may produce sorrow, but not repentance. And whether those who have lived under the continual calls of grace to virtue and holiness, who have rejected the counsel of God whilst they had health and strength to serve, shall be thought worthy of such extraordinary mercy at last, let any reasonable man judge. It cannot be supposed that God intends to save Christians in this way, which would be at once to evacuate all the rules and duties of the Gospel. Christ came to destroy sin and the works of the devil; but were men promised forgiveness upon the account of a few sighs and tears at last, this would effectually establish and confirm the kingdom of Satan. Though God has promised pardon to penitent sinners, yet his promise must be expounded so as to be consistent with his design in sending Christ into the world: and then it can never be extended to those, who use the Gospel as a protection to wickedness, and sin because God has promised to be merciful. In a word, you have the promises of the Gospel set before you, you have the mercies of God in Christ offered to you: if you will accept them, and do your part, happy are you: but if you are for finding out new ways to salvation, if you seek to reconcile the pleasures and profits of sin with the hopes of the Gospel, you do but deceive yourselves; for God is not mocked, nor will he regard those who make such perverse use of his mercy.

What then remains, but that all who love their own souls seek the Lord whilst happily he may be found; and work for their salvation whilst they have the light; *for the night cometh, when no man can*

work. The night cometh on apace, and brings with it a change which every mortal must undergo. Then shall we be forsaken of all our pleasures and enjoyments, and deserted by those gay thoughts which now support our foolish hearts against the fears of religion. The time cometh, and who, O Lord, may abide its coming! when we must stand before the judgment seat of Christ; when the highest and the lowest shall be placed on the same level, expecting a new distribution of honours and rewards. In that day the stoutest heart will tremble, and the countenance of the proudest man will fall in the presence of his injured Lord. I speak not to you the suggestion of superstition or fear, but the words of soberness and of truth. May they sink into your hearts, and yield you the fruits of spiritual joy and comfort here, and of glory and immortality hereafter!

SERMON VI.

On the Sufferings of Christ.

ISAIAH, liii. 3.

He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.

WHEN our Lord was led away to be crucified, and the women bewailed and lamented his misery, he turned about to them, and said, *daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves.* Words, which we may very properly apply to ourselves for the direction of our devotion on this day * of his crucifixion: a day it is of sorrow and mourning, but not for his sake, who, crowned with glory and honour, is set down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; but for our own, whose sins brought down this load of woe and of misery upon our blessed Redeemer. If we consider with how unbounded a love he embraced us in our lowest state of weakness, and with how cool an affection we approach to him; how much he gladly endured upon our account, and how unwillingly we suffer any thing upon his; if we reflect how earnestly he laboured to save our souls, and how carelessly and wantonly

* Good Friday.

we throw them away; what pains and sorrows he underwent to perfect our redemption, and to what empty pleasures he sacrificed all his sufferings, and our own eternal happiness, it will shew us where the true cause of our grief lies, and how vainly we compliment our Lord, by venting our indignation against his ancient crucifiers, which ought to be sent upon ourselves, who are daily renewing his shame, and crucifying him afresh.

Whilst therefore I represent unto you this scene of woe, and endeavour to place before you *this man of sorrow, and acquainted with grief*, let every Christian heart supply this necessary admonition, that this he suffered for my sake; then cast ye look upon yourselves, and see how ye have deserved all this love; this will teach you how to divide your affections, to admire and adore the unbounded goodness of your Redeemer, and to lament and weep only for yourselves.

Many prophecies there are relating to our Lord, which regard only some particular circumstances of his life; but this the text points at no single calamity that befel him, but is a general description of his condition during his abode on earth: it begins at his cradle, and ends with his cross, pursuing him in every step, and discovers to us the Son of God through the darkest veil of sorrow and affliction.

Known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world: in wisdom he ordained them all, and in mercy he has revealed some of them to the children of men. How gracious was it in him to rewarn the world by the spirit of prophecy of the mean appearance of their Redeemer, that their faith might be tried against the reproach and contempt which attended his poverty, and the great scandal of his cross! In human reckoning a mean condition bespeaks a mean man; but here the case is otherwise: for, when God had foretold the mean appearance of his Son, his poverty became a proof of his authority, and the meanness of his condition shewed the excellency of his person. He was *a man of sorrow, and acquainted with grief*; had he not been so, we could never have believed him to be that glorious Redeemer, who, as the spirit of prophecy foretold, should be *despised and*

rejected of men. The consideration, therefore, of our Saviour's sufferings is not only an argument to inflame our love, but to strengthen our faith likewise; shewing as well that he is our Redeemer, as how much he underwent for the sake of our redemption.

There are three things then which may deserve your attention in this subject:

I. The wisdom and goodness of God in determining to send his Son into the world in a state of poverty and affliction.

II. The evidence of prophecy, that he should so appear in the fullness of time.

III. The historical evidence, that he did so appear, and that in him the prophecies had their completion.

I. The wisdom and goodness of God in determining to send his Son into the world in a state of poverty and affliction.

The sufferings of Christ we find often insisted on by the sacred writers, as an evidence of the mercy of God towards mankind. Thus St. Paul, *he that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* And again, *God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us*. So likewise St. John, *hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us*. This indeed was a great demonstration of his love; for, as our blessed Lord himself hath told us, *greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*. Were it then ever so hard to render an account of Christ's sufferings to the inquisitive, to the reasoners of this world; yet, since it is plain his sufferings were upon our account, if we consider them as an argument of God's goodness, and our Redeemer's love to us, it stands clear of all difficulties whatever, and plainly speaks how much our salvation was the care of Heaven. Perhaps we cannot see the reasons that made it necessary for Christ to die, that the world might live: but this we certainly know, that, if Christ died that the world might live, he had an exceeding great tenderness for the world, and we are bound to him in the strictest bonds of gratitude and love. And, since this scene lies so open to our view, it shews great perverseness of mind, and a base ungenerous disposition, to shut

our eyes upon it, and to narden our hearts against the impressions of so much kindness, and to amuse ourselves with curious inquiries into the hidden reason of this mysterious love. What is it that your Lord requires of you, but to love and to obey him? What greater inducement can you have to both than this, that he first loved you, and laid down his life for you? Could you give ten thousand reasons for the expediency of his so doing, yet still your love and your obedience would stand upon the same bottom, that Christ died, that you might live. What purpose then of religion would it serve to know these hidden things of God? Knowledge will save no man. And who would not chuse rather to be found in the number of the most ignorant lovers of Christ, and of his word, than among the profoundest inquirers into the secret mysteries of Providence? Would you see the goodness of God? Nothing plainer, Christ died for you. Would you encourage yourself in the practice of virtue by the expectation of God's assistance and favour? Or, would you comfort yourself in your repentance, and be glad to know that God will receive you, if you return from the evil of your ways? Go, learn to reason of St. Paul: *if God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how will he not with him also freely give us all things?*

Thus far then, that is, as far as we are concerned to go, our knowledge is clear and distinct, and the sufferings of Christ afford us such an argument for love and obedience, as the weakest man must understand, and the wisest must adore.

But farther: though we cannot enter into the hidden wisdom of God, and see the reasons which made it necessary for Christ to suffer; yet if we consider his sufferings with respect to ourselves, we may discern many wise ends of Providence in this dispensation.

1. With regard to his being a teacher, his sufferings set him above the reach of suspicions. What ends could he have to serve by his doctrine, who met with nothing but misery and affliction, as the reward of his labour? Religions, we know, have been instituted to serve the ends of policy, and new kingdoms have sprung out of new doctrines: thus the empire and alcoran of Mahomet have

the same date. But what room is there for these jealousies with respect to the Christian religion? What advantage did Christ or his followers make of the Gospel? The master lived in poverty, and the disciples in distress; he ended his life upon the cross, they theirs by sundry kinds of death. Nor was he appointed in meeting with this usage: he knew before that it was ordained for him; and it was one great part of his business to prepare his disciples to follow his example, by acquainting them long before of the afflictions which both he and they were to endure. Some perhaps will suspect there was no wisdom in this; and all, I think, must own, that there was no worldly wisdom in it. Had our Lord come in the form of a temporal prince, surrounded with power and majesty, often had we heard before now of his cunning and his policy, and been told, that our religion was more nearly allied to this world than the other. But now the Gospel stands clear of all these objections, from which perhaps nothing could have purged it but the blood of its Divine Author.

2. With regard to our Lord's being an example of holiness and obedience, let before us for our instruction and imitation. His sufferings render the pattern perfect, and shew his virtues in their truest lustre, and at the same time silence the pleas which laziness or self-love would otherwise have suggested. Had he lived in worldly prosperity, and found all things easy about him, let his virtues have been ever so conspicuous, his example would have been extended but a little way. Perhaps poor men, and unfortunate, would have upbraided the rich and prosperous for not following the copy set before them; but they would have thought their own hard circumstances a sufficient excuse for not attempting it. But what pretence is there now left for any mortal? Are you more wretched than your master? Are you poor, and therefore discontented? Look to him, who had not where to lay his head, and yet was easy, and paid a cheerful obedience to his God. Are you provoked by ill usage to forget the peaceful duties of charity? Are you hurried to revenge by uncommon injuries? And can you at the same time think yourself a disciple of the blessed Jesus, who even upon the

cross, and under the bitter agonies of death, prayed for his persecutors; *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

3. With regard to his divine mission. His sufferings were an evident token that the hand of God was with him. He only can produce strength out of weakness, and knows how to confound the mighty things of the world by things which are of no account. Power, we know, especially if attended with happy incidents, can produce great things; but a weak poor man is so easily oppressed, that this before us is perhaps the only instance in which a whole nation ever rose to suppress one. And what was it that enabled him to withstand the rage of the people, and the malice of the priests, supported by the power of the government? When his life was sought, he was hid in the midst of the crowd, and was covered with darkness at noon-day; but, when his time was come, he fell an easy victim: but his death, like Sampson's, was more victorious than his life; in this only it differed, Sampson by his death destroyed his enemies, but the enemies of Christ were by his death re- deemed.

Add to this, the evidence of prophecy, which is so much the stronger, by how much the weaker Christ was: so admirably has the wisdom of God displayed itself in this mystery of faith. Had the prophets foretold that a great man should do great things; whenever that great man had come, it might have been doubted whether he was the person foretold, and whether his mighty deeds were not the common effects of such might and power as he was armed with: but when the prophets declared, that all they foretold should be accomplished by a mean and wretched man, oppressed with sorrow, and worn out with grief; this was a case that could not be mistaken, hardly two such men could come; and whenever he came, he would be easily distinguished by the greatness of his works, and the meanness of his condition. And this leads me to consider,

II. The evidence of prophecy concerning the mean appearance our Lord was to make.

I shall not need to carry you far in search of this evidence; the chapter of the text alone is so full a description of

this part of our Saviour's character, that it looks more like an history than a prophecy, and may with more reason be suspected to be a copy drawn from his life, than not to be a description of it. Yet this Scripture was in being long before our Lord was born, was in the keeping of his enemies, of those who hated and despised him, and at last put him to a cruel death, and were at once the preservers and the fulfillers of this prophecy. Here you find him represented as void of form and of comeliness; as having no beauty that we should desire him; one despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; from whom we hid as it were our faces; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Yet this is he, of whom before the Prophet had prophesied: *Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace; of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever.* What enigmas are these? Shall he be a mighty prince, and yet despised and rejected of men? Shall he be encompassed with the glories of David's throne, and yet be void of form and of comeliness? Shall he reign for ever, and establish justice and judgment for evermore, and shall he yet be taken from prison, and cut off from the land of the living? Where can these contradictions meet, and in what manner of person can they be reconciled? But to go on: After this general description of his low estate, the Prophet proceeds to point out some of the most remarkable calamities of his life. He was not only despised and rejected, but he was oppressed and afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, and cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of the people he was stricken. And yet, he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and to put him to grief. His soul was an offering for sin. And yet, after this, when the Prophet had killed and buried him, he adds, *he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see the tra-*

vail of his soul, and shall be satisfied. By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Where are we now? Must he die a wretched death, and be numbered with the transgressors; and yet shall he prolong his days, and see the work of the Lord prosper in his hands? How shall we clear these things? Look into the Gospel, and there you will find the scene opening apace; there you will find your Lord despised and rejected of men, persecuted and afflicted, and put to a cruel death and open shame, and yet rising to glory and honour. There you may see this prisoner of the grave ascending to the glory of his Father, giving gifts unto men, and leading captivity captive.

Let us then, in the last place, consider the historical evidence we have for the completion of these prophecies, which describe the calamitous condition of our blessed Redeemer.

The way was prepared before he was born. His conception led to it; since the meanness of his parentage could promise nothing for the child but labour and sorrow: and so it proved. This mighty Prince of Peace made his first appearance in a manger; and we may well suppose the other conveniences he met, upon his first coming into the world, were answerable to this. No sooner was he born, but his life was fought after: the distressed parents fly their country, and the child is carried into banishment, before he knew to distinguish between good and evil. His youth was spent in the difficulties of poverty, and his hands employed in the works of it; and when the time came that he was to be made known unto Israel, and stood forth in the power of the Lord, confirming his doctrine with mighty signs and wonders, the opposition to him increased, and every act of charity he did to others brought new sorrow and misery to himself. During this time, in which he went about doing good, *he had not*, as he himself has told us, *where to lay his head*. When he cast out devils, he was immediately charged to be in league with the prince them. When he healed the sick of of their infirmities, and forgave their sins, then he was a blasphemer, an encroacher upon the prerogative of God. When he restored the withered hand, and

cured the lame or the blind on the Sabbath day, then he was no longer fit to live: these were such offences, as nothing but his death could expiate. Consider what he suffered, and he was the lowest of the sons of men: consider what he did, and he appears, as he truly was to be the Son of God.

But still there remains behind the gloomiest scene of sorrow. When the powers of darkness prevailed, and the time of his being offered up drew near, all things conspired to make his death bitter and terrifying. In his life he had chosen twelve to be his constant companions, and they at least adhered to him, and willingly partook in his afflictions: but now one of these bosom friends conspires his ruin, and sells him for thirty pieces of silver. The rest, though they were guilty of no such baseness, yet proved no comfort in his distress.

As the danger drew near, our blessed Lord, who was in all things tempted like unto us, sin only excepted, felt the pangs of nature at the approach of death, and retired to prayer, the only support of an afflicted spirit. In this his grief he chose Peter, and the sons of Zebedee, to be his companions, that they might watch with him in his sorrow: but even here they forsook him; and, insensible of their master's agony, fell asleep. They were soon awakened; but they awoke only to fly, and Christ was left alone. Peter followed, but it was afar off; and he only followed him to deny him. Thus betrayed, and thus forsaken, he is carried to judgment. When he is silent, he is reproached with fullness: when he speaks, he is charged with blasphemy. Sometimes he is buffeted and spit on; by and by, in cruel sport, they pay him the mock honours of a prince, he is crowned with thorns, has a reed put into his hand, and in derision he is saluted, *hail, King of the Jews*. And that nothing might be wanting to shew how vile and contemptible he was to the people, the question was put between him and a murderer, which should be released; and with one voice the people answered, *release unto us Barabbas*. Thus was he *despised and rejected of men*.

Follow him but one step farther, and you will find him hanging upon the cross between two common robbers, groaning under the bitterest agonies of death. Not yet

yet can all this misery create in the lookers on any pity or compassion. See how they shake their heads, and say, *come down from the cross, Son of God, come down, and we will believe thee.* But neither the pains of the cross, nor those hangings which drew from him that complaint, *my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me,* nor all the malice and scorn of the crucifiers, could make him one moment forget his love and tenderness towards them. You hear no complaint from him, no appeals made against them to a future judgment: instead of this, with his latest breath he pleads their cause, excuses their weakness, and begs for their pardon; *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

And here let us close this scene, and return to ourselves with this question, *What reward shall I give unto the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?* Let us also answer for ourselves in the words of the Psalmist, *I will receive the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.* We have nothing to return but our love and obedience, and nothing is required of us. *He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows;* let us not all for them again by our iniquities: let them be buried for ever, but let us rise to a new life of righteousness in Christ Jesus, that *when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we may also appear with him in glory.*

S E R M O N VII.

On the last Judgment.

2 COR. V. 10, 11.

We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men.

It is the privilege and distinguishing character of a rational being to be able to look forward into futurity, and consider his actions, not only with respect to the present advantage or disadvantage arising from them, but to view them in their consequences through all the parts of time in which himself may possibly exist. If therefore we value the privilege of being reasonable creatures,

the only way to preserve it, is to make use of it; and by extending our views into all the scenes of futurity, in which we ourselves must bear a part, to lay the foundation of solid and durable happiness.

By the exercise of this power of reason, the wisest among the Heathens discovered, that there was ground for men to have expectations beyond this life. They saw plainly that themselves, and all things that fell under their observation, were dependent beings on the will and power of him who formed them; and when they sought to find him, they were led, by a necessary chain of reasoning, to the acknowledgment of a supreme, independent, intelligent Being. They saw, in every part of the creation, evident marks of his power, wisdom, and goodness: they discerned that all the inanimate parts of the world acted perpetually in submission to the law of their creation; the sun and all the host of heaven were constant to their courses; and, in every other part, the powers of nature were duly and regularly exerted for the preservation of the present system: among men only they found disorder and confusion. That they had reason was plain; that they were intended to live according to reason could not be doubted; and yet they saw virtue often distressed and abandoned to all the evils of life, vice triumphant, and the world every where subject to the violence of pride and ambition. How to account for this they knew not: this only they could observe, that man was endowed with a freedom in acting, which the other beings of the lower world wanted; and to this they rightly ascribed the disorders to be found in this part of the creation. But though this accounted for the growth of evil, yet it rendered no account of the justice or goodness of God in permitting vice oftentimes to reign here in glory, whilst virtue suffered in distress. Upon these considerations they concluded, that there must be another state after this, in which all the present inequalities in the administration of Providence should be set right, and every man receive according to his works.

This was, this is the ground of our natural expectation of a life after this. But upon this ground of truth many fables and stories were raised, by fear and

superstition, and by the power of imagination: so that the general belief, though right in its foundation, yet in almost all the particulars of it was rendered ridiculous and absurd. Hence it is, that, among the writers of antiquity, we sometimes find wise men ridiculing the follies and superstitions of the people, and bad men always arguing from these follies against the very notion itself, and calling in question the reality of any future state.

Under these circumstances of the world, our blessed Lord appeared to bring to light life and immortality through the Gospel. Let us then consider how this fundamental article of religion now stands upon the foot of the Gospel revelation.

As to the principal point, there is no difference between the hopes conveyed to us in the Gospel, and the expectation built upon natural reason: for, as the wisest men thought there must be, so the Gospel assures us there will be, *a day in which God will judge the world in righteousness; and render to every man according to his works.* Thus far then the doctrine of the Gospel, and the dictates of natural reason must stand or fall together. If this doctrine has had a larger and more extensive influence through the authority of the Gospel, than it could have had by the mere force of speculative reasoning, the world has received an advantage by the encouragement given to virtue, and the restraint laid upon vice by these means, which ought ever to be acknowledged with thankfulness.

But the Gospel has added to this doctrine, and communicated to us the knowledge of some circumstances, which were not discoverable but by the means of revelation; and they are principally these: that there shall be a resurrection of the body; that Christ shall be judge of the world; that the rewards and punishments in another life shall be in proportion to our behaviour in this.

I shall speak briefly to these particulars, and shew for what purpose they were revealed.

First, The resurrection of the body was revealed to give all men a plain and a sensible notion of their being subject to a future judgment. Death is the destruction of the man; and sure we are that the lifeless body is no man; and what-

ever notions some may have of the soul in its state of separate existence, yet a mere spirit is not a man; for man is made of soul and body: and therefore to bring the man into judgment to answer for his deeds, the soul and the body must be brought together again. This doctrine, established upon the authority of the Gospel, does not remove all prejudices of the case, when examined by the short and scanty notions we have of the powers of nature; but it effectually removes all difficulties that affect this belief, considered with respect to religion and morality. For the single point in which religion is concerned, is to know whether men shall be accountable hereafter for their actions here. Reason tells us they ought to be so: but a great difficulty arises from the dissolution of the man by death; a difficulty followed by endless speculations upon the nature of the soul, of its separate existence, of its guilt in this separate state, with respect to crimes committed in another, and in conjunction with the body, and by other difficulties of the like kind. But take in the declaration of Gospel, that soul and body shall be as certainly united at the resurrection as they were divided by death, and every man be himself again; and there is no more difficulty in conceiving that men may be judged for their iniquities hereafter, than there is in conceiving that they may be judged here, when they offend against the laws of the country.

But still there are prejudices remaining: to some it is incredible that the dead should be raised. To these we answer, upon the foot of the Gospel evidence, that the dead have been raised; upon the foot of reason, that it is altogether as credible, that God should be able to raise the dead to life a second time, as that he was able to give them life at first. There is no difference in the cases; they are acts of one and the very same power.

But we are further asked, what body shall be raised, since no man has exactly the same body two days together? new parts are perpetually added by nutrition, old ones carried off by perspiration: so that in the compass of a few years a human body may be almost totally altered, and be no more the same than a ship which has been so often repaired, that no part of the original materials is left. But this objection, as plausible as it may seem,

seem, has nothing to do in the present case; for religion is concerned only to preserve the identity or sameness of the person, as the object of future judgment; and has nothing to do with that kind of identity against which the objection can be supposed to have any force. Were the case otherwise, the difficulty would be really as great in human judgments in this life, as in the divine judgment hereafter. Suppose a man should commit murder when he was twenty, and not be discovered till he was sixty, and then brought to trial; would common sense admit him to plead that he was not the same person who committed the fact; and to allege, in proof of it, the alterations in his body for the last forty years? Suppose then, that instead of being discovered at sixty, he should die at sixty; and should rise either with the body he had at sixty, or twenty, or in any intermediate time, would not the case be just the same with respect to the future judgment? Evidently it would be the same: which shews that the article of the resurrection, as far as it is a support of religion, and of a future judgment, stands quite clear of this difficulty.

But the prejudices which affect men most, when they consider this article of the resurrection, arise from the weakest of all imaginations, that they can judge from the settled laws and course of nature, what is or is not possible to the power of God. It is very true, that all our powers are bounded by the laws of nature; but does it follow that his power must be so bounded, who appointed these laws of nature, and could have appointed others, if he had thought proper? We cannot raise a dead body; our hands are tied up by the laws of nature, which we cannot surpass. Neither can we make or create a new man; but we certainly know, from reason and experience, that there is one who can: and what can induce us to suppose, that he cannot give life to a body a second time, who we certainly know gave life to it at first? These prejudices therefore we may safely refer to the power of the Almighty, to which all nature is obedient, and upon which we may securely depend for the performance of divine promises, how unpromising soever the circumstances may seem to be which attend them. When the Sadducees denied the resurrection, our Saviour told

them, *Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God*: intimating plainly, that for the security and certainty of our resurrection we must trust to Scripture, and the declaration of God's purpose contained therein; and for the method and means of bringing this great work to pass we must rely on the power of God.

But whatever difficulties of this kind may remain, yet this article has removed all which lie in the way of our considering ourselves as accountable creatures, and subject to the future judgment of God. Whatever you may imagine to be the state of separate souls; whatever difficulties may arise in considering a mere spirit as accountable for the actions of this compound being, man; they are all out of the question. It is not a mere spirit, but the man himself, who is to be brought to judgment; and plain sense must see and acknowledge the reasonableness of judging a man hereafter for the crimes committed in this life; as evidently as it sees the reasonableness of judging him here, when his crimes happen to be detected. So that the revelation in this particular has brought faith and common sense to a perfect agreement.

Secondly, The Gospel revelation has made known to us, that Christ shall be judge of the world.

Our Saviour tells us, that *the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son*. John, v. 22. And again: *The Father hath given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man*, ver. 27. And St. Peter declares, that the apostles had it expressly in their commission to publish this doctrine to all the world: *He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead*, Acts, x. 42. Accordingly St. Paul, in his short discourse to the men of Athens, fully instructed them in this material point: *God hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by the man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead*, Acts, xvii. 31.

I will not multiply texts to this purpose, though many more there are which speak the same sense, because this doctrine

doctrine is very well known to Christians, and is part of the creed which we daily rehearse.

But it is material to observe, that this authority is given to Christ, *because he is the Son of Man*, as he himself has assured us; and that the person ordained to be judge is a man, even *the man whom God raised from the dead*, as St. Paul asserts. How happy is it for us to have a judge, I had almost said so partial, but I may well say so favourable, to us, that he was content to be himself the sacrifice to redeem us from the punishment due to our sins? When we consider ourselves, how wretched and weak we are, how perpetually doing wrong, either wilfully or ignorantly, and contemplate the infinite majesty, holiness, and justice of God, what account can we hope to give of ourselves to him, whose eyes are purer than to behold iniquity? But see, God hath withdrawn his terrors, and has given a man to be the judge of men. So that we may say of our judge what the Apostle to the Hebrews says of our high priest, *We have not a judge which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all things tempted like as we are; yet without sin.*

You may think perhaps that this is drawing consequences upon the foot of vulgar apprehensions, and that in reality there is no difference, whether God be judge himself, or commits the judgment to the Son of man: for, since Christ shall come not only in the power, but in the wisdom and the justice of God also to judge the world, what difference can there be in the judgment, since in both cases it must be guided and formed by the wisdom and justice of God? True it is, that a mere man is not qualified to be judge of the world; the knowledge of hearts is necessary to the right discharge of that office; a knowledge which no mere man was ever endowed with. But still, if the man is to be judge, the sentiments, notions, and feeling of the man, however guided and influenced by superior wisdom, must preside over and govern the whole action; otherwise the man will not be judge. And hence we may answer some difficulties which speculative men have brought into the subject of a future judgment. Some have imagined that justice, mercy, and goodness, in God, are not of the same kind with

justice, mercy, and goodness, in men; and therefore that we can never, from our notions of these qualities in man, argue consequentially to the attributes of God, or to the acts flowing from these attributes. The result of which is, that when we talk of God's justice or mercy in judging the world, we talk of something which we do not understand. But if men would consult Scripture, these difficulties would not meet them in their way: for surely we know what justice, mercy, and goodness, mean among men; and since the Scripture assures us, that the man whom God raised from the dead is ordained Judge of the world, we may be very certain, that the justice, mercy, and goodness, to be displayed in the future judgment, will be such as all men have a common sense and apprehension of; unless you can imagine that a new rule is to be introduced, to which the judge, and those to be judged, are equally strangers. Upon this foot of Scripture then we may certainly know, what the justice, mercy, and goodness, are by which we must finally stand or fall; and this point being secured, the speculation may be left to shift for itself.

And thus you see how this great and fundamental article of religion, involved in darkness in former ages, is made plain and sensible to mankind by the light of the Gospel. That men were accountable, they always knew; that there would be a future judgment was generally believed; but how men were to appear in judgment, or how mere unbodied spirits were to be judged, how rewarded, or how punished, they knew not. That the right of judging men was in God was well known; but how he would exercise it, whether by himself or another, visibly or invisibly, they knew not. Infinite were the disputes upon this subject: instead of which the Gospel has given a plain sensible representation, assuring us that at the judgment we shall be, what we now are, men, real men; and that the man Christ Jesus, who appeared in the world to redeem us, will appear again to judge us by that very Gospel, and those very rules, which he has left us to govern and conduct ourselves by.

Thirdly, Let us then go one step farther, and view the consequences of this judgment; this solemn judgment, which every mortal must undergo. If we con-

ult either Scripture or reason, we shall find no evidence of any farther change to be made in our future state, after once judgment has passed on us. That we are accountable, and shall therefore be judged, reason says; but can see nothing relating to us after judgment, except the reward or the punishment consequent upon it: and therefore the only conclusion to be drawn from this information is, that the condition of man will be finally determined as to happiness or misery, and consequently that man must continue under the good or the bad effects of the last judgment.

As reason can shew us nothing beyond judgment, but that state and condition which are the effect of it; so the Holy Scripture has given us reason to think that nothing else there shall be, by describing the rewards and punishments of another life, as having perpetual duration. Life eternal is prepared for the righteous, and everlasting punishment for the wicked. The fire prepared to receive them is never to go out; the worm prepared to torment them will never die. These images carry great terror with them, and have led some to a milder interpretation of the threats of Scripture, than the language of it seems to import. But even the mildest interpretation, that allows any meaning at all to those threats, supposes the punishment to last as long as the sinner lasts. So that in this, the lowest view, our all depends upon the judgment which shall be finally passed on us at the second coming of our Lord. There is then a business of thought, as well as great

charity to the souls of men, in what the Apostle adds, *Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.* If the Christian revelation has cleared our doubts, by bringing life and immortality to light through the Gospel; if it has given us ground for hope and confidence by assuring us that we shall be judged by him, *who so loved us, that he gave himself for us*, and submitted to die that we might live; it has also given us ground to be watchful and careful over ourselves, and to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. For it is a fearful thing to be to answer for ourselves before the Searcher of all hearts; to answer to him who loved us, for despising the love he shewed us; to answer to him who died for us, for having crucified him afresh, and put him to open shame; and for having accounted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing. This will be the sad case of every wilful sinner. The view of this misery and distress, which sinners are calling upon themselves by their iniquity, moved the Apostle, and must ever move those who succeed to his office, to warn men *to flee from the wrath that is to come.* We know the terror of the Lord, and therefore persuade men. Happy would it be, if men, knowing and considering these terrors, would suffer themselves to be persuaded. Which God grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord:

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all honour and glory, henceforth, and for evermore. Amen.

SECTION IV.

FROM THE

SERMONS of the Right Rev. JOSEPH BUTLER, LL.D.
Lord Bishop of BRISTOL.

SERMON I.

On the Government of the Tongue.

JAMES, i. 26.

If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

THE translation of this text would be more determinate by being more literal, thus: *If any man among you seemeth to be religious, not bridling his tongue, but deceiving his own heart, this man's religion is vain.* This determines that the words, *but deceiveth his own heart*, are not put in opposition to, *seemeth to be religious*, but to, *bridleth not his tongue*. The certain determinate meaning of the text then being, that he who seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but in that particular deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain; we may observe somewhat very forcible and expressive in these words of St. James. As if the Apostle had said, no man surely can make any pretences to religion, who doth not at least believe that he bridleth his tongue: if he puts on any appearance and face of religion, and yet does not govern his tongue, he must surely deceive himself in that particular, and think he does: and whoever is so unhappy as to deceive himself in this, to imagine he keeps that unruly faculty in due subjection, when indeed he does not, whatever the other part of his life be, his religion is vain; the government of the tongue being a most material restraint which virtue lays us under: without it no man can be truly religious. In treating upon this subject I will consider,

I. What is the general vice or fault here referred to: or what disposition in men is supposed in moral reflections and precepts concerning *bridling the tongue*.

II. When it may be said of any one, that he has a due government over himself in this respect.

I. Now the fault referred to, and the disposition supposed, in precepts and reflections concerning the government of the tongue, is not evil-speaking from malice, nor lying or bearing false witness from indirect selfish designs. The disposition to these, and the actual vices themselves, all come under other subjects. The tongue may be employed about, and made to serve, all the purposes of vice, in tempting and deceiving, in perjury and injustice. But the thing here supposed and referred to is talkativeness: a disposition to be talking, abstracted from the consideration of what is to be said, with very little or no regard to, or thought of doing, either good or harm. And let not any imagine this to be a slight matter, and that it deserves not to have so great weight laid upon it, till he has considered what evil is implied in it, and the bad effects which follow from it. It is perhaps true, that they who are addicted to this folly, would choose to confine themselves to trifles and indifferent subjects, and so intend only to be guilty of being impertinent: but as they cannot go on for ever talking of nothing, as common matters will not afford sufficient fund for perpetual continued discourse; when subjects of this kind are exhausted, they will go on to defamation, scandal, divulging of secrets, their own secrets as well as those of others, any thing rather than be silent. They are plainly hurried on in the heat of their talk to say quite different things from

from what they first intended, and which they afterwards wish unsaid; or improper things, which they had no other end in saying but only to afford employment to their tongue. And if these people expect to be heard and regarded, for there are some content merely with talking, they will invent to engage your attention: and, when they have heard the least imperfect hint of an affair, they will out of their own head add circumstances of time and place, and other matters, to make out their story, and give the appearance of probability to it: not that they have any concern about being believed, otherwise than as a means of being heard. The thing is, to engage your attention; to take you up wholly for the present time: what reflections will be made afterwards, is in truth the least of their thoughts. And further, when persons, who indulge themselves in these liberties of the tongue, are in any degree offended with another, as little disgusts and misunderstandings will be, they allow themselves to defame and revile such an one without any moderation or bounds; though the offence is so very slight, that they themselves would not do, nor perhaps wish him an injury in any other way. And in this case the scandal and revilings are chiefly owing to talkativeness, and not bridling their tongue; and so come under our present subject. The least occasion in the world will make the humour break out in this particular way, or in another. It is like a torrent, which must and will flow; but the least thing imaginable will first of all give it either this or another direction, turn it into this or that channel; or like a fire, the nature of which, when in a heap of combustible matter, is to spread and lay waste all around; but any one of a thousand little accidents will occasion it to break out first either in this or another particular part.

The subject then before us, though it does run up into, and can scarce be treated as entirely distinct from all others; yet it needs not be so much mixed or blended with them as it often is. Every faculty and power may be used as the instrument of premeditated vice and wickedness, merely as the most proper and effectual means of executing such designs. But if a man, from deep malice and desire of revenge, should meditate a

falsehood with a settled design to ruin his neighbour's reputation, and should with great coolness and deliberation spread it, nobody would choose to say of such an one, that he had no government of his tongue. A man may use the faculty of speech as an instrument of false witness, who yet has so entire a command over that faculty, as never to speak but from forethought and cool design. Here the crime is injustice and perjury; and, strictly speaking, no more belongs to the present subject, than perjury and injustice in any other way. But there is such a thing as a disposition to be talking for its own sake; from which persons often say any thing, good or bad, of others, merely as a subject of discourse, according to the particular temper they themselves happen to be in, and to pass away the present time. There is likewise to be observed in persons such a strong and eager desire of engaging attention to what they say, that they will speak good or evil, truth or otherwise, merely as one or the other seems to be most hearkened to: and this, though it is sometimes joined, is not the same with the desire of being thought important and men of consequence. There is in some such a disposition to be talking, that an offence of the slightest kind, and such as would not raise any other resentment, yet raises, if I may so speak, the resentment of the tongue, puts it into a flame, into the most ungovernable motions. This outrage, when the person it respects is present, we distinguish in the lower rank of people by a peculiar term: and let it be observed, that though the decencies of behaviour are a little kept, the same outrage and virulence, indulged when he is absent, is an offence of the same kind. But not to distinguish any further in this manner: men run into faults and follies, which cannot so properly be referred to any one general head as this, that they have not a due government over their tongue.

And this unrestrained volubility and wantonness of speech is the occasion of numberless evils and vexations of life. It begets resentment in him who is the subject of it; sows the seed of strife and dissension amongst others; and inflames little disgusts and offences, which if let alone would wear away of themselves: it is often of as bad effect upon the good
name

name of others, as deep envy or malice : and, to say the least of it in this respect, it destroys and perverts a certain equity of the utmost importance to society to be observed ; namely, that praise and dispraise, a good or bad character, should always be bestowed according to desert. The tongue used in such a licentious manner is like a sword in the hand of a madman ; it is employed at random, it can scarce possibly do any good, and for the most part does a world of mischief ; and implies not only great folly and a trifling spirit, but great viciousness of mind, great indifference to truth and falsity, and to the reputation, welfare, and good of others. So much reason is there for what St. James says of the tongue, chap. iii. 5, 6, *It is a fire, a world of iniquity, it defileth the whole body, setteth on fire the course of nature, and is itself set on fire of hell.* This is the faculty or disposition which we are required to keep a guard upon : these are the vices and follies it runs into, when not kept under due restraint.

II. Wherein the due government of the tongue consists, or when it may be said of any one in a moral and religious sense that he *bridleth his tongue*, I come now to consider,

The due and proper use of any natural faculty or power, is, to be judged of by the end and design for which it was given us. The chief purpose for which the faculty of speech was given to man, is plainly that we might communicate our thoughts to each other, in order to carry on the affairs of the world ; for business, and for our improvement in knowledge and learning. But the good Author of our nature designed us not only necessities, but likewise enjoyment and satisfaction, in that being he hath graciously given, and in that condition of life he hath placed us in. There are secondary uses of our faculties ; they administer to delight, as well as to necessity ; and as they are equally adapted to both, there is no doubt but he intended them for our gratification, as well as for the support and continuance of our being. The secondary use of speech is to please and be entertaining to each other in conversation. This is in every respect allowable and right : it unites men closer in alliances and friendships ; gives us a fellow feeling of the prosperity and happiness of

each other ; and is in several respects serviceable to virtue, and to promote good behaviour in the world. And provided there be not too much time spent in it, if it were considered only in the way of gratification and delight, men must have strange notions of God and of religion, to think that he can be offended with it, or that it is any way inconsistent with the strictest virtue. But the truth is, such sort of conversation, though it has no particular good tendency, yet it has a general good one : it is social and friendly, and tends to promote humanity, good nature, and civility.

As the end and use, so likewise the abuse, of speech, relates to the one or other of these ; either to business or to conversation. As to the former, deceit in the management of business and affairs does not properly belong to the subject now before us : though one may just mention that multitude, that endless number, of words with which business is perplexed ; when a much fewer would, as it should seem, better serve the purpose : but this must be left to those who understand the matter. The government of the tongue, considered as a subject of itself, relates chiefly to conversation ; to that kind of discourse which usually fills up the time spent in friendly meetings, and visits of civility. And the danger is, lest persons entertain themselves and others at the expence of their wisdom and their virtue, and to the injury or offence of their neighbour. If they will observe and keep clear of these, they may be as free, and easy, and unreserved, as they can desire.

The cautions to be given for avoiding these dangers, and to render conversation innocent and agreeable, fall under the following particulars : silence ; talking of indifferent things ; and, which makes up too great a part of conversation, giving of characters ; speaking well or evil of others.

The wise man observes, that there is a time to speak, and a time to keep silence. One meets with people in this world, who seem never to have made the least of these observations. And yet these great talkers do not at all speak from their having any thing to say, as every sentence shews, but only from their inclination to be talking. Their conversation is merely an exercise of the tongue :

no other human faculty has any share in it. It is strange these persons can help reflecting, that unless they have in truth a superior capacity, and are in an extraordinary manner furnished for conversation; if they are entertaining, it is at their own expence. Is it possible, that it should never come into people's thoughts to suspect, whether or not it be to their advantage to shew so very much of themselves? *O that you would altogether hold your peace, and it should be your wisdom.* Job, xiii. 5. Remember likewise there are persons who love fewer words, an inoffensive sort of people, and who deserve some regard, though of too still and composed tempers for you. Of this number was the son of Sirach: for he plainly speaks from experience when he says, *As hills of sand are to the steps of the aged, so is one of many words to a quiet man.* But one would think it should be obvious to every one, that when they are in company with their superiors of any kind, in years, knowledge, and experience; when proper and useful subjects are discoursed of, which they cannot bear a part in; that these are times for silence; when they should learn to hear, and be attentive, at least in their turn. It is indeed a very unhappy way these people are in: they in a manner cut themselves out from all advantage of conversation, except that of being entertained with their own talk: their business in coming into company not being at all to be informed, to hear, to learn; but to display themselves, or rather to exert their faculty, and talk without any design at all. And if we consider conversation as an entertainment, as somewhat to unbend the mind; as a diversion from the cares, the business, and the sorrows, of life; it is, of the very nature of it, that the discourse be mutual. This, I say, is implied in the very notion of what we distinguish by conversation, or being in company. Attention to the continued discourse of one alone grows more painful often, than the cares and business we come to be diverted from. He therefore who imposes this upon us, is guilty of a double offence, arbitrarily enjoining silence upon all the rest, and likewise obliging them to this painful attention.

I am sensible these things are apt to be passed over, as too little to come into a

serious discourse; but in reality men are obliged, even in point of morality and virtue, to observe all the decencies of behaviour. The greatest evils in life have had their rise from somewhat, which was thought of too little importance to be attended to. And as to the matter we are now upon, it is absolutely necessary to be considered. For if people will not maintain a due government over themselves, in regarding proper times and seasons for silence, but will be talking; they certainly, whether they design it or not at first, will go on to scandal and evil-speaking, and divulging secrets.

If it were needful to say any thing further, to persuade men to learn this lesson of silence, one might put them in mind, how insignificant they render themselves by this excessive talkativeness: inasmuch that, if they do chance to say any thing which deserves to be attended to and regarded, it is lost in the variety and abundance which they utter of another sort.

The occasions of silence then are obvious, and one would think should be easily distinguished by every body: namely, when a man has nothing to say, or nothing, but what is better unsaid: better, either in regard to the particular persons he is present with; or from its being an interruption to conversation itself; or to conversation of a more agreeable kind; or better, lastly, with regard to himself. I will end this particular with two reflections of the wise man: one of which, in the strongest manner, exposes the ridiculous part of this licentiousness of the tongue; and the other the great danger and viciousness of it: *When he that is a fool walketh by the way side, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool.* Ecc. x. 3. The other is, *In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin.* Prov. x. 19.

As to the government of the tongue, in respect to talking upon indifferent subjects: after what has been said concerning the due government of it in respect to the occasions and times for silence, there is little more necessary, than only to caution men to be fully satisfied, that the subjects are indeed of an indifferent nature; and not to spend too much time in conversation of this kind. But persons must be sure to take heed, that the subject of their discourse be at least of an indifferent

indifferent nature: that it be no way offensive to virtue, religion, or good manners; that it be not of a licentious dissolute sort, this leaving always ill impressions upon the mind; that it be no way injurious or vexatious to others; and that too much time be not spent this way, to the neglect of those duties and offices of life which belong to their station and condition in the world. However, though there is not any necessity, that men should aim at being important and weighty in every sentence they speak; yet since useful subjects, at least of some kinds, are as entertaining as others, a wise man, even when he desires to unbend his mind from business, would choose that the conversation might turn upon somewhat instructive.

The last last thing is, the government of the tongue, as relating to discourse of the affairs of others, and giving of characters. These are in a manner the same: and one can scarce call it an indifferent subject, because discourse upon it almost perpetually runs into somewhat criminal.

And first of all, it were very much to be wished that this did not take up so great a part of conversation; because it is indeed a subject of a very dangerous nature. Let any one consider the various interests, competitions, and little misunderstandings which arise amongst men; and he will soon see that he is not unprejudiced and impartial; that he is not, as I may speak, neutral enough, to trust himself with talking of the character and concerns of his neighbour, in a free, careless, and unreserved manner. There is perpetually, and often it is not attended to, a rivalry amongst people of one kind and another, in respect to wit, beauty, learning, fortune, and that one thing will insensibly influence them to speak to the disadvantage of others, even where there is no formed malice or ill design. Since therefore it is so hard to enter into this subject without offending, the first thing to be observed is, that people should learn to decline it; to get over that strong inclination most have to be talking of the concerns and behaviour of their neighbour.

But since it is impossible that this subject should be wholly excluded conversation; and since it is necessary that the characters of men should be known;

the next thing is, that it is a matter of importance what is said; and therefore, that we should be religiously scrupulous and exact to say nothing, either good or bad, but what is true. I put it thus, because it is in reality of as great importance to the good of society, that the characters of bad men should be known, as that the characters of good men should. People who are given to scandal and detraction, may indeed make an ill use of this observation: but truths which are of service towards regulating our conduct, are not to be disowned, or even concealed, because a bad use may be made of them. This however would be effectually prevented, if these two things were attended to. First, That though it is equally of bad consequence to society, that men should have either good or ill characters which they do not deserve, yet when you say somewhat good of a man which he does not deserve, there is no wrong done him in particular; whereas, when you say evil of a man which he does not deserve, here is a direct formal injury, a real piece of injustice done him. This therefore makes a wide difference; and gives us, in point of virtue, much greater latitude in speaking well than ill of others. Secondly, A good man is friendly to his fellow-creatures, and a lover of mankind, and so will, upon every occasion, and often without any, say all the good he can of every body: but, so far as he is a good man, will never be disposed to speak evil of any, unless there be some other reason for it, besides barely that it is true. If he be charged with having given an ill character, he will scarce think it a sufficient justification of himself to say it was a true one, unless he can also give some further account how he came to do so: a just indignation against particular instances of villany, where they are great and scandalous; or to prevent an innocent man from being deceived and betrayed, when he has great trust and confidence in one who does not deserve it. Justice must be done to every part of a subject, when we are considering it. If there be a man, who bears a fair character in the world, whom yet ye know to be without faith or honesty, to be really an ill man; it must be allowed, in general, that we shall do a piece of service to society, by letting such an one's true character be known.

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This is no more, than what we have an instance of in our Saviour himself, (Mark, xii. 38. 40.) though he was mild and gentle beyond example. However, no words can express too strongly the caution which should be used in such a case as this.

Upon the whole matter: if people would observe the obvious occasions of silence, if they would subdue the inclination to tale-bearing, and that eager desire to engage attention, which is an original disease in some minds; they would be in little danger of offending with their tongue; and would, in a moral and religious sense, have due government over it.

I will conclude with some precepts and reflections of the son of Sirach upon this subject. *Be swift to hear: and, if thou hast understanding, answer thy neighbour: if not, lay thy hand upon thy mouth. Honour and shame is in talk. A man of an ill tongue is dangerous in his city, and he that is rash in his talk shall be hated. A wise man will hold his tongue, till he see opportunity; but a babler and a fool will regard no time. He that useth many words shall be abhorred; and he that taketh to himself authority therein, shall be hated. A back-biting tongue hath disquieted many; strong cities hath it pulled down, and overthrown the houses of great men. The tongue of a man is his fall; but if thou love to hear, thou shalt receive understanding.*

S E R M O N II.

Upon Self-Deceit.

2 SAMUEL, xii. 7.

And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man.

THESE words are the application of Nathan's parable to David, upon occasion of his adultery with Bathsheba, and the murder of Uriah her husband. The parable, which is related in the most beautiful simplicity, is this: ver. 1. *There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: but the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay*

*in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock, and of his own herd, to dress for the way-faring man that was come unto him, but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him. And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, as the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die. And he shall restore the lamb four-fold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. David passes sentence, not only that there should be four-fold restitution made; but he proceeds to the rigour of justice, *the man that hath done this thing shall die*: and this judgment is pronounced with the utmost indignation against such an act of inhumanity; *as the Lord liveth, he shall surely die: and his anger was greatly kindled against the man*. And the Prophet answered, *Thou art the man*. He had been guilty of much greater inhumanity, with the utmost deliberation, thought, and contrivance. Near a year must have passed, between the time of the commission of his crimes, and the time of the Prophet's coming to him; and it does not appear from the story, that he had in all this while the least remorse or contrition.*

There is not any thing, relating to men and characters, more surprising and unaccountable, than this partiality to themselves, which is observable in many; as there is nothing of more melancholy reflection, respecting morality, virtue, and religion. Hence it is that many men seem perfect strangers to their own characters. They think, and reason, and judge quite differently upon any matter relating to themselves, from what they do in cases of others where they are not interested. Hence it is one hears people exposing follies, which they themselves are eminent for; and talking with great severity against particular vices, which, if all the world be not mistaken, they themselves are notoriously guilty of. This self-ignorance and self-partiality may be in all different degrees. It is a lower degree of it, which David himself refers to in these words, *Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O cleanse thou me from my secret faults*. This is the ground of that advice of Elihu to Job: *Surely it is meet to be said unto God—That which I see*

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not, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more. And Solomon saw this thing in a very strong light, when he said, *he that trusteth his own heart is a fool.* This likewise was the reason why that precept, *Know thyself*, was so frequently inculcated by philosophers of old. For if it were not for that partial and fond regard to ourselves, it would certainly be no great difficulty to know our own character, what passes within the bent and bias of our mind; much less would there be any difficulty in being rightly of our own actions. But from this partiality it frequently comes to pass, that the observation of many men's being themselves last of all acquainted with what falls out in their own families, may be applied to a nearer home, to what passes within their own breasts.

There is plainly, in the generality of mankind, an absence of doubt or distrust, in a very great measure, as to their moral character and behaviour; and likewise a disposition to take for granted, that all is right and well with them in these respects. The former is owing to their not reflecting, not exercising their judgment upon themselves; the latter to self-love. I am not speaking of that extravagance, which is sometimes to be met with; instances of persons declaring in words at length, that they never were in the wrong, nor had ever any diffidence to the justness of their conduct, in their whole lives. No, these people are too far gone to have any thing said to them. The thing before us is indeed of this kind, but in a lower degree, and confined to the moral character; somewhat of which we must all of us have, without reflecting upon it. Now consider how long, and how grossly, a person of the best understanding might be imposed upon by one of whom he had not any suspicion, and in whom he placed an entire confidence; especially if there were friendship and real kindness in the case: surely this holds even stronger with respect to that self we are all so fond of. Hence arises in men a disregard of reproof and instruction, rules of conduct and moral discipline, which occasionally come in their way: a disregard, I say, of these; not in every respect, but in this single one, namely, as what may be of service to them in particular towards mending their own hearts and tempers;

and making them better men. It never in earnest comes into their thoughts, whether such admonitions may not relate, and be of service to themselves; and this quite distinct from a positive persuasion to the contrary, a persuasion from reflection that they are innocent and blameless in those respects. Thus we may invert the observation which is somewhere made upon Brutus, that he never read but in order to make himself a better man. It scarce comes into the thoughts of the generality of mankind, that this use is to be made of moral reflections which they meet with; that this use, I say, is to be made of them by themselves, for every body observes and wonders that it is not done by others.

Further, there are instances of persons having so fixed and steady an eye upon their own interest, whatever they place it in, and the interest of those whom they consider as themselves, as in a manner to regard nothing else; their views are almost confined to this alone. Now we cannot be acquainted with, or in any propriety of speech be said to know, any thing but what we attend to. If therefore they attend only to one side, they really will not, cannot see or know what is to be alleged on the other. Though a man hath the best eyes in the world, he cannot see any way but that which he turns them. Thus these persons, without passing over the least, the most minute thing which can possibly be urged in favour of themselves, shall overlook entirely the plainest and most obvious things on the other side. And whilst they are under the power of this temper, thought and consideration, upon the matter before them, has scarce any tendency to set them right: because they are engaged, and their deliberation concerning an action to be done, or reflection upon it afterwards, is not to see whether it be right, but to find out reasons to justify or palliate it; palliate it, not to others, but to themselves.

In some there is to be observed a general ignorance of themselves, and wrong way of thinking and judging in every thing relating to themselves; their fortune, reputation, every thing in which self can come in: and this perhaps attended with the rightest judgment in all other matters. In others this partiality is not so general, has not taken hold of the

whole man, but is confined to some particular favourite passion, interest, or pursuit; suppose ambition, covetousness, any other. And these persons may probably judge and determine what is perfectly just and proper, even in things which they themselves are concerned, these things have no relation to their particular favourite passion or pursuit. Hence arises that amazing incongruity, and seeming inconsistency of character, from whence slight observers take it for granted, that the whole is hypocritical and false; not being able otherwise to reconcile the several parts: whereas in truth there is real honesty, so far as it goes. There is such a thing as men's being honest to such a degree, and in such respects, but no further. And this, if it is true, so it is absolutely necessary to be taken notice of, and allowed them; such general and undistinguished censure of their whole characters, as designing and false, being one main thing which confirms them in their self-deceit. They know that the whole censure is not true; and so take for granted that no part of it is.

But to go on with the explanation of the thing itself: Vice in general consists in having an unreasonable and too great regard to ourselves, in comparison of others. Robbery and murder is never from the love of injustice and cruelty, but to gratify some other passion, to gain some supposed advantage: and it is false selfishness alone, whether cool or passionate, which makes a man resolutely pursue that end, be it ever so much to the injury of another. But whereas, in common and ordinary wickedness, this unreasonableness, this partiality and selfishness relates only, or chiefly, to the temper and passions, in the characters we are now considering, it reaches to the understanding, and influences the very judgment. And, besides that general want of distrust and diffidence concerning our own character, there are, you see, two things, which may thus prejudice and darken the understanding itself: that over-fondness for ourselves, which we are so liable to; and also being under the power of any particular passion or appetite, or engaged in any particular pursuit. And these, especially the last of the two, may be in so great a degree, as to influence our judgment, even of

other persons and their behaviour. Thus a man, whose temper is formed to ambition or covetousness, shall even approve of them sometimes in others.

This seems to be in a good measure the account of self-partiality and self-deceit, when traced up to its original. Whether it be, or be not thought satisfactory, that there is such a thing, is manifest; and that it is the occasion of great part of the unreasonable behaviour of men towards each other: that by means of it they palliate their vices and follies to themselves: and that it prevents their applying to themselves those reproofs and instructions, which they meet with either in scripture, or in moral and religious discourses, though exactly suitable to the state of their own mind, and the course of their behaviour. There is one thing further to be added here, that the temper we distinguish by hardness of heart with respect to others, joined with this self-partiality, will carry a man almost any lengths of wickedness, in the way of oppression, hard usage of others, and even to plain injustice; without his having, from what appears, any real sense at all of it. This indeed was not the general character of David: for he plainly gave scope to the affections of compassion and good-will, as well as to his passions of another kind.

But as some occasions and circumstances lie more open to this self-deceit, and give it greater scope and opportunities than others, these require to be particularly mentioned.

It is to be observed then, that as there are express determinate acts of wickedness, such as murder, adultery, theft: so on the other hand, there are numberless cases in which the vice and wickedness cannot be exactly defined; but consists in a certain general temper and course of action, or in the neglect of some duty, suppose charity or any other, whose bounds and degrees are not fixed. This is the very province of self-deceit and self-partiality: here it governs without check or controul. "For what commandment is there broken? Is there a transgression where there is no law? a vice which cannot be defined?"

Whoever will consider the whole commerce of human life, will see that a great part, perhaps the greatest part, of the

intercourse amongst mankind, cannot be reduced to fixed determinate rules. Yet in these cases there is a right and a wrong: a merciful, a liberal, a kind and compassionate behaviour, which surely is our duty; and an unmerciful contracted spirit, an hard and oppressive course of behaviour, which is most certainly immoral and vicious. But who can define precisely, wherein that contracted spirit and hard usage of others consist, as murder and theft may be defined? There is not a word in our language, which expresses more detestable wickedness than oppression; yet the nature of this vice cannot be so exactly stated, nor the bounds of it so determinately marked, as that we shall be able to say in all instances, where rigid right and justice ends, and the oppression begins. In these cases there is great latitude left, for every one to determine for, and consequently to deceive, himself. It is chiefly in these cases, that self-deceit comes in; as every one must see that there is much larger scope for it here, than in express, single, determinate acts of wickedness. Of this, the story of David, now before us, affords the most astonishing instance. It is really prodigious, to see a man, before so remarkable for virtue and piety, going on deliberately from adultery to murder, with the same cool contrivance, and, from what appears, with as little disturbance, as a man would endeavour to prevent the ill consequences of a mistake he had made in any common matter. That total insensibility of mind with respect to these horrid crimes, after the commission of them, manifestly shews that he did some way or other delude himself: and this could not be with respect to the crimes themselves, they were so manifestly of the grossest kind. What the particular circumstances were, with which he extenuated them, and quieted and deceived himself, are not related.

Having thus explained the nature of internal hypocrisy and self-deceit, and remarked the occasions upon which it exerts itself; there are several things further to be observed concerning it: that all of the sources, to which it was traced up, are sometimes observable together in one and the same person: but that one of them is more remarkable, and to a higher degree, in some, and others of them are so in others: that in general it is a com-

plicated thing; and may be in all different degrees and kinds; that the temper itself is essentially in its own nature vicious and immoral. It is unfairness; it is dishonesty; it is falseness of heart: and is therefore so far from extenuating guilt, that it is itself the greatest of all guilt in proportion to the degree it prevails; for it is a corruption of the whole moral character in its principle. Our understanding and sense of good and evil, is the light and guide of life: *If therefore that light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness?* Matt. vi. 23. For this reason our Saviour puts an evileye as the direct opposite to a single eye; the absence of that simplicity, which these last words imply, being itself evil and vicious. And whilst men are under the power of this temper, in proportion still to the degree they are so, they are fortified on every side against conviction: and when they hear the vice and folly of what is in truth their own course of life, exposed in the justest and strongest manner, they will often assent to it, and even carry the matter further; persuading themselves, one does not know how, but some way or other persuading themselves, that they are out of the case, and that it hath no relation to them. Yet, notwithstanding this, there frequently appears a suspicion, that all is not right, or as it should be; and perhaps there is always at bottom somewhat of this sort. There are doubtless many instances of the ambitious, the revengeful, the covetous, and those whom with too great indulgence we only call the men of pleasure, who will not allow themselves to think how guilty they are, who explain and argue away their guilt to themselves: and though they do really impose upon themselves in some measure, yet there are none of them but have, if not a proper knowledge, yet at least an implicit suspicion, where the weakness lies, and what part of their behaviour they have reason to wish unknown or forgotten for ever. Truth, and real good sense, and thorough integrity, carry along with them a peculiar consciousness of their own genuineness: there is a feeling belonging to them, which does not accompany their counterfeits, error, folly, half honesty, partial and slight regards to virtue and right, so far only as they are consistent with that course of gratification which men happen to be set upon.

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And, if this be the case, it is much the same as if we should suppose a man to have had a general view of some scene, enough to satisfy him that it was very very disagreeable, and then to shut his eyes, that he might not have a particular or distinct view of its several deformities. It is as easy to close the eyes of the mind, as those of the body: and the former is more frequently done with wilfulness, and yet not attended to, than the latter; the actions of the mind being more quick and transient, than those of the senses. This may be further illustrated by another thing observable in ordinary life. It is not uncommon for persons, who run out their fortunes, entirely to neglect looking into the state of their affairs, and this from a general knowledge, that the condition of them is bad. These extravagant people are perpetually ruined before they themselves expected it: and they tell you for an excuse, and tell you truly, that they did not think they were so much in debt, or that their expences so far exceeded their income. And yet no one will take this for an excuse, who is sensible that their ignorance of their particular circumstances was owing to their general knowledge of them; that is, their general knowledge, that matters were not well with them, prevented them looking into particulars. There is somewhat of the like kind with this in respect to morals, virtue, and religion. Men find that the survey of themselves, their own heart and temper, their own life and behaviour, doth not afford them satisfaction: things are not as they should be: therefore they turn away, will not go over particulars, or look deeper, lest they should find more amiss. For who would chuse to be put out of humour with himself? No one surely, if it were not in order to mend, and to be more thoroughly and better pleased with himself for the future.

If this sincere self-enjoyment and home-satisfaction be thought desirable, and worth some pains and diligence, the following reflections will, I suppose, deserve your attention, as what may be of service and assistance to all who are in any measure honestly disposed, for avoiding that fatal self-deceit, and towards getting acquainted with themselves.

The first is, That those who have never had any suspicion of, who have never

made allowances for this weakness in themselves, who have never, if I may be allowed such a manner of speaking, caught themselves in it, may almost take for granted that they have been very much misled by it. For consider: nothing is more manifest, than that affection and passion of all kinds influence the judgment. Now as we have naturally a greater regard to ourselves than to others, as the private affection is more prevalent than the public, the former will have proportionally a greater influence upon the judgment, upon our way of considering things. People are not backward in owning this partiality of judgment, in cases of friendship and natural relation. The reason is obvious, why is it not so readily acknowledged, when the interest which misleads us is more confined, confined to ourselves: but we all take notice of it in each other in these cases. There is not any observation more common, than that there is no judging of a matter from hearing only one side. This is not founded upon supposition, at least it is not always, of a formed design in the relater to deceive; for it holds in cases, where he expects that the whole will be told over again by the other side. But the supposition, which this observation is founded upon, is the very thing now before us; namely, that men are exceedingly prone to deceive themselves, and judge too favourably in every respect, where themselves and their own interest are concerned. Thus, though we have not the least reason to suspect that such an interested person hath any intention to deceive us, yet we of course make great allowances for his having deceived himself. If this be general, almost universal, it is prodigious that every man can think himself an exception, and that he is free from this self-partiality. The direct contrary is the truth. Every man may take for granted that he has a great deal of it, till, from the strictest observation upon himself, he finds particular reason to think otherwise.

Secondly, There is one easy and almost sure way to avoid being misled by this self-partiality, and to get acquainted with our real character: to have regard to the suspicious part of it, and keep a steady eye over ourselves in that respect. Suppose then a man fully satisfied with

himself, and his own behaviour, such an one, if you please, as the Pharisee in the Gospel, or a better man. Well, but allowing this good opinion you have of yourself to be true, yet every one is liable to be misrepresented. Suppose, then, an enemy was to set about defaming you, what part of your character would he single out? What particular scandal, think you, would he be most likely to fix upon you? And what would the world be most ready to believe? There is scarce a man living but could, from the most transient superficial view of himself, answer this question: What is that ill thing, that faulty behaviour, which I am apprehensive an enemy, who was thoroughly acquainted with me, would be most likely to lay to my charge, and which the world would be most apt to believe? It is indeed possible that a man may not be guilty in that respect. All that I say is, let him in plainness and honesty fix upon that part of his character for a particular survey and reflection, and by this he will come to be acquainted, whether he be guilty or innocent in that respect, and how far he is one or the other.

Thirdly, It would very much prevent our being misled by this self-partiality, to reduce that practical rule of our Saviour, *Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do unto them*, to our judgment and way of thinking. This rule, you see, consists of two parts. One is, to substitute another for yourself when you take a survey of any part of your behaviour, or consider what is proper and fit, and reasonable for you to do upon any occasion: the other part is, that you substitute yourself in the room of another; consider yourself as the person affected by such a behaviour, or towards whom such an action is done: and then you would not only see, but likewise feel, the reasonableness or unreasonableness of such an action or behaviour. But alas, the rule itself may be dishonestly applied: there are persons who have not impartiality enough with respect to themselves, nor regard enough for others, to be able to make a just application of it. This just application, if men would honestly make it, is in effect all that I have been recommending; it is the whole thing, the direct contrary to that inward dishonesty as respecting our intercourse with our fellow creatures.

And even the bearing this rule in their thoughts may be of some service; the attempt thus to apply it is an attempt towards being fair and impartial, and may chance unawares to shew them to themselves, to shew them the truth of the case they are considering.

Upon the whole it is manifest, that there is such a thing as self-partiality and self-deceit: that in some persons it is to a degree which would be thought incredible, were not the instances before our eyes; of which the behaviour of David is perhaps the highest one possible, in a single particular case; for there is not the least appearance, that it reached his general character: that we are almost all of us influenced by it in some degree, and in some respects: that therefore every one ought to have an eye to and beware of it. And all that I have further to add upon this subject is, that either there is a difference between right and wrong, or there is not: religion is true, or it is not. If it be not, there is no reason for any concern about it: but if it be true, it requires real fairness of mind and honesty of heart. And, if people will be wicked, they had better of the two be so from the common vicious passions without such refinements, than from this deep and calm source of delusion, which undermines the whole principle of good, darkens that light, that *candle of the Lord within*, which is to direct our steps, and corrupts conscience, which is the guide of life.

S E R M O N III.

On the Character of Balaam,

NUMB. XXIII. 10.

Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.

THESE words, taken alone, and without respect to him who spoke them, lead our thoughts immediately to the different ends of good and bad men. For, though the comparison is not expressed, yet it is manifestly implied; as is also the preference of one of these characters to the other in that last circumstance, death. And, since dying the death of the righteous or of the wicked necessarily implies men's being righteous or wicked,

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i. e. having lived righteously or wickedly, a comparison of them in their lives also might come into consideration from such a single view of the words themselves. But my present design is, to consider them with a particular reference or respect to him who spoke them; which reference, if you please to attend, you will see. And if what shall be offered to your consideration at this time be thought a discourse upon the whole history of this man, rather than upon the particular words I have read, this is of no consequence: it is sufficient, if it afford reflection of use and service to ourselves.

But, in order to avoid cavils respecting this remarkable relation in Scripture, let me just observe, that as this is not a place for answering them, so they no way affect the following discourse, since the character there given is plainly a real one in life, and such as there are parallels to.

The occasion of Balaam's coming out of his own country into the land of Moab, where he pronounced this solemn prayer or wish, he himself relates in the first parable or prophetic speech, of which it is the conclusion. In which it is a custom referred to, proper to be taken notice of: that of devoting enemies to destruction, before the entrance upon a war with them. This custom appears to have prevailed over a great part of the world; for we find it amongst the most distant nations. The Romans had public officers, to whom it belonged as a stated part of their office. But there was somewhat more particular in the case now before us; Balaam being looked upon as an extraordinary person, whose blessing or curse was thought to be always effectual.

In order to engage the reader's attention to this passage, the sacred historian has enumerated the preparatory circumstances, which are these. Balaam requires the king of Moab to build him seven altars, and to prepare him the same number of oxen and of rams. The sacrifice being over, he retires alone to a solitude sacred to these occasions, there to wait the divine inspiration or answer, for which the foregoing rites were the preparation: ver. 4, 5. *And God met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth, upon receiving of which, he returns back to*

the altars; where was the king, who had all this while attended the sacrifice, as appointed; he and all the princes of Moab standing, big with expectation of the Prophet's reply: ver. 6. *And he took up his parable and said, Balak the king of Moab hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel. How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? Or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied? For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him; lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.*

It is necessary, as you will see in the progress of this discourse, particularly to observe what he understood by righteous. And he himself is introduced in the book of Micah explaining it: if by righteous is meant good, as to be sure it is. *O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal.* From the mention of Shittim it is manifest, that it is this very story which is here referred to, though another part of it, the account of which is not now extant; as there are many quotations in Scripture out of books which are not come down to us. *Remember what Balaam answered, that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord, i. e. the righteousness which God will accept. Balak demands, Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? Balaam answers him, He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy; and to walk humbly with thy God?* Here is a good man expressly characterised, as distinct from a dishonest and superstitious man. No words can more strongly exclude dishonesty and falseness of heart, than doing justice, and loving mercy: and both these, as well as walking humbly with God, are put in opposition to those

ceremonial methods of recommendation, which Balak hoped might have served the turn. From hence appears what he meant by the righteous, whose death he desires to die.

Whether it was his own character shall now be inquired: and in order to determine it, we must take a view of his whole behaviour upon this occasion. When the elders of Moab came to him, though he appears to have been much allured with the rewards offered, yet he had such regard to the authority of God, as to keep the messengers in suspense until he had consulted his will. *And God said to him, Thou shalt not go with them, thou shalt not curse the people, for they are blessed.* Upon this he dismisses the ambassadors, with an absolute refusal of accompanying them back to their king. Thus far his regard to his duty prevailed, neither does there any thing appear as yet amiss in his conduct. His answer being reported to the king of Moab, a more honourable embassy is immediately dispatched, and greater rewards proposed. Then the iniquity of his heart began to disclose itself. A thorough honest man would without hesitation have repeated his former answer, that he could not be guilty of so infamous a prostitution of the sacred character with which he was invested, as in the name of a Prophet to curse those whom he knew to be blessed. But instead of this, which was the only honest part in these circumstances that lay before him, he desires the princes of Moab to tarry that night with him also; and for the sake of the reward deliberates whether, by some means or other, he might not be able to obtain leave to curse Israel; to do that, which had been before revealed to him to be contrary to the will of God, which yet he resolves not to do without that permission. Upon which, as when this nation afterwards rejected God from reigning over them, he gave them a king in his anger; in the same way, as appears from other parts of the narration, he gives Balaam the permission he desired: for this is the most natural sense of the words. Arriving in the territories of Moab, and being received with particular distinction by the king, and he repeating in person the promise of the rewards he had before made to him by his ambassadors; he seeks, the text says, by sacrifices and

enchancements (what these were is not to our purpose) to obtain leave of God to curse the people; keeping still his resolution not to do it without that permission: which not being able to obtain, he had such regard to the command of God, as to keep this resolution to the last. The supposition of his being under a supernatural restraint is a meer fiction of Philo: he is plainly represented to be under no other force or restraint, than the fear of God. However, he goes on persevering in that endeavour, after he had declared, that *God had not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither had he seen perverseness in Israel*; i. e. they were a people of virtue and piety, so far as not to have drawn down, by their iniquity, that curse which he was soliciting leave to pronounce upon them. So that the state of Balaam's mind was this: he wanted to do what he knew to be very wicked, and contrary to the express command of God; he had inward checks and restraints, which he could not entirely get over; he therefore casts about for ways to reconcile this wickedness with his duty. How great a paradox soever this may appear, as it is indeed a contradiction in terms, it is the very account which the Scripture gives us of him.

But there is a more surprising piece of iniquity yet behind. Not daring in his religious character, as a Prophet, to assist the king of Moab, he considers whether there might not be found some other means of assisting him against that very people, whom he himself, by the fear of God, was restrained from cursing in words. One would not think it possible, that the weakness, even of religious self-deceit in its utmost excess, could have so poor a distinction, so fond an evasion, to serve itself of. But so it was: and he could think of no other method, than to betray the children of Israel to provoke his wrath who was their only strength and defence. The temptation which he pitched upon, was that concerning which Solomon afterwards observed, that it had *cast down many wounded; yea, many strong men had been slain by it*: and of which he himself was a sad example, when *his wives turned away his heart after other Gods*. This succeeded: the people sin against God; and thus the Prophet's counsel brought on that destruction, which he could by no means be

prevailed upon to assist with the religious ceremony of execration, which the king of Moab thought would itself have effected it. Their crime and punishment are related in Deuteronomy and Numbers. And from the relation repeated in Numbers, it appears that Balaam was the contriver of the whole matter. It is also ascribed to him in the Revelations, where he is said to have *taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel.*

This was the man, this Balaam, I say, was the man who desired to *die the death of the righteous*, and that his *last end might be like his*; and this was the state of his mind, when he pronounced these words.

So that the object we have now before us is the most astonishing in the world: a very wicked man, under a deep sense of God and religion, persisting still in his wickedness, and preferring the wages of unrighteousness, even when he had before him a lively view of death, and that approaching period of his days, which should deprive him of all those advantages for which he was prostituting himself; and likewise a prospect, whether certain or uncertain, of a future state of retribution: all this joined with an explicit, ardent wish, that, when he was to leave this world, he might be in the condition of a righteous man. Good God, what inconsistency, what perplexity is here! With what different views of things, with what contradictory principles of action, must such a mind be torn and distracted! It was not unthinking carelessness, by which he run on headlong in vice and folly, without ever making a stand to ask himself what he was doing: no; he acted upon the cool motives of interest and advantage. Neither was he totally hard and callous to impressions of religion, what we call abandoned; for he absolutely denied to curse Israel. When reason assumes her place, when convinced of his duty, when he owns and feels, and is actually under the influence of the divine authority; whilst he is carrying on his views to the grave, the end of all temporal greatness; under this sense of things, with the better character and more desirable state present full before him, in his thoughts, in his wishes, voluntarily to choose the worse, what fatality is here! Or how

otherwise can such a character be explained? And yet, strange as it may appear, it is not altogether an uncommon one: nay, with some small alterations, and put a little lower, it is applicable to a very considerable part of the world. For, if the reasonable choice be seen and acknowledged, and yet men make the unreasonable one, is not this the same contradiction; that very inconsistency, which appeared so unaccountable?

To give some little opening to such characters and behaviour, it is to be observed in general, that there is no account to be given in the way of reason of men's so strong attachments to the present world; our hopes and fears and pursuits are in degrees beyond all proportion to the known value of the things they respect. This may be said without taking into consideration religion and a future state; and when these are considered, the disproportion is infinitely heightened. Now when men go against their reason, and contradict a more important interest at a distance, for one nearer, though of less consideration; if this be the whole of the case, all that can be said is, that strong passions, some kind of brute force within, prevails over the principle of rationality. However, if this be with a clear, full and distinct view of the truth of things, then it is doing the utmost violence to themselves, acting in the most palpable contradiction to their very nature. But if there be any such thing in mankind, as putting half-deceits upon themselves; which there plainly is, either by avoiding reflection, or, if they do reflect, by religious equivocation, subterfuges, and palliating matters to themselves; by these means conscience may be laid asleep, and they may go on in a course of wickedness with less disturbance. All the various turns, doubles, and intricacies in a dishonest heart, cannot be unfolded or laid open; but that there is somewhat of that kind is manifest, be it to be called self-deceit, or by any other name. Balaam had before his eyes the authority of God, absolutely forbidding him what he, for the sake of a reward, had the strongest inclination to: he was likewise in a state of mind sober enough to consider death and his last end: by these considerations he was restrained first from going to the king of Moab; and after he did go,
from

from cursing Israel. But notwithstanding this, there was great wickedness in his heart. He could not forego the rewards of unrighteousness: he therefore first seeks for indulgencies; and when these could not be obtained, he sins against the whole meaning, end and design of the prohibition, which no consideration in the world could prevail with him to go against the letter of. And surely that impious counsel, he gave to Balak against the children of Israel, was considered in itself a greater piece of wickedness, than if he had cursed them in words.

If it be inquired what his situation, his hopes and fears were, in respect to this his wish? the answer must be, that consciousness of the wickedness of his heart must necessarily have destroyed all settled hopes of dying the death of the righteous; he could have no calm satisfaction in this view of his last end: yet, on the other hand, it is possible that those partial regards to his duty now mentioned, might keep him from perfect despair.

Upon the whole, it is manifest that Balaam had the most just and true notions of God and religion; as appears, partly from the original story itself, and more plainly from the passage in Micah, where he explains religion to consist in real virtue and real piety, expressly distinguished from superstition, and in terms which most strongly exclude dishonesty and falseness of heart. Yet you see his behaviour: he seeks indulgencies for plain wickedness; which not being able to obtain, he glosses over that same wickedness, dresses it up in a new form, in order to make it pass off more easily with himself. That is, he deliberately contrives to deceive and impose upon himself, in a matter which he knew to be of the utmost importance.

To bring these observations home to ourselves: It is too evident that many persons allow themselves in very unjustifiable courses, who yet make great pretences to religion; not to deceive the world, none can be so weak as to think this will pass in our age; but from principles, hopes, and fears, respecting God and a future state; and go on thus with a sort of tranquillity and quiet of mind. This cannot be upon a thorough consideration, and full resolution, the pleasures and advantages they propose are to be pursued at all hazards, against reason,

against the law of God, and though everlasting destruction is to be the consequence. This would be doing too great violence upon themselves. No, they are for making a composition with the Almighty. These of his commands they will obey; but as to others, why they will make all the atonements in their power; the ambitious, the covetous, the dissolute man, each in a way which shall not contradict his respective pursuit. Indulgencies before, which was Balaam's first attempt, though he was not so successful in it as to deceive himself, or atonements afterwards, are all the same. And here perhaps come in faint hopes that they may, and half-resolves that they will, one time or other, make a change.

Besides these, there are also persons, who from a more just way of considering things, see the infinite absurdity of this, of substituting sacrifice instead of obedience; there are persons far enough from superstition, and not without some real sense of God and religion upon their minds; who yet are guilty of most unjustifiable practices, and go on with great coolness and command over themselves. The same dishonesty and unsoundness of heart discovers itself in these another way. In all common ordinary cases we see intuitively at first view what is our duty, what is the honest part. This is the ground of the observation, that the first thought is often the best. In these cases, doubt and deliberation is itself dishonesty; as it was in Balaam upon the second message. That which is called considering what is our duty in a particular case, is very often nothing but endeavouring to explain it away. Thus those courses, which, if men would fairly attend to the dictates of their own consciences, they would see to be corruption, excess, oppression, uncharitableness; these are refined upon; things were so and so circumstantiated; great difficulties are raised about fixing bounds and degrees: and thus every moral obligation whatever may be evaded. Here is scope, I say, for an unfair mind to explain away every moral obligation to itself. Whether men reflect again upon this internal management and artifice, and how explicit they are with themselves, is another question. There are many operations of the mind, many things pass within, which we never reflect

reflect upon again; which a by-stander from having frequent opportunities of observing us and our conduct, may make shrewd guesses at.

That great numbers are in this way of deceiving themselves is certain. There is scarce a man in the world, who has entirely got over all regards, hopes, and fears, concerning God and a future state; and these apprehensions in the generality, bad as we are, prevail in considerable degrees: yet men will and can be wicked with calmness and thought; we see they are. There must therefore be some method of making it sit a little easy upon their minds; which, in the superstitious, is those indulgencies and atonements before mentioned, and this self-deceit of another kind in persons of another character. And both these proceed from a certain unfairness of mind, a peculiar inward dishonesty; the direct contrary to that simplicity which our Saviour recommends, under the notion of *becoming little children*, as a necessary qualification for our entering into the kingdom of heaven.

But to conclude: How much soever men differ in the course of life they prefer, and in their ways of palliating and excusing their vices to themselves; yet all agree in the one thing, *desiring to die the death of the righteous*. This is surely remarkable. The observation may be extended further, and put thus: even without determining what that is which we call guilt or innocence, there is no man but would choose, after having had the pleasure or advantage of a vicious action, to be free of the guilt of it, to be in the state of an innocent man. This shews at least the disturbance and implicit dissatisfaction in vice. If we inquire into the grounds of it, we shall find it proceeds partly from an immediate sense of having done evil; and partly from an apprehension, that this inward sense shall one time or another be seconded by an higher judgment, upon which our whole being depends. Now to suspend and drown this sense, and these apprehensions, be it by the hurry of business or of pleasure, or by superstition, or moral equivocations, this is in a manner one and the same, and makes no alteration at all in the nature of our case. Things and actions are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they

will be: why then should we desire to be deceived? As we are reasonable creatures, and have any regard to ourselves, we ought to lay these things plainly and honestly before our mind, and upon this, act as you please, as you think most fit; make that choice, and prefer that course of life, which you can justify to yourselves, and which sits most easy upon your own mind. It will immediately appear, that vice cannot be the happiness, but must upon the whole be the misery, of such a creature as man; a moral, an accountable agent. Superstitious observances, self-deceit though of a more refined sort, will not in reality at all mend matters with us. And the result of the whole can be nothing else, but that with simplicity and fairness, we *keep innocency, and take heed unto the thing that is right; for this alone shall bring a man peace at the last*.

SERMON IV. and V.

Upon the Love of God.

MATTH. xxii. 37.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

EVERY body knows, you therefore need only just be put in mind, that there is such a thing, as having so great horror of one extreme, as to run insensibly and of course into the contrary; and that a doctrine's having been a shelter for enthusiasm, or made to serve the purposes of superstition, is no proof of the falsity of it: truth or right being somewhat real in itself, and so not to be judged of by its liableness to abuse, or by its supposed distance from or nearness to error. It may be sufficient to have mentioned this in general, without taking notice of the particular extravagancies, which have been vented under the pretence or endeavour of explaining the love of God; or how manifestly we are got into the contrary extreme, under the notion of a reasonable religion; so very reasonable, as to have nothing to do with the heart and affections, if these words signify any thing but the faculty by which we discern speculative truth.

By the love of God, I would understand all those regards, all those affections
of

of mind which are due immediately to him from such a creature as man, and which rest in him as their end. As this does not include fervile fear; so neither will any other regards, how reasonable soever, which respect any thing out of or besides the perfection of the Divine Nature, come into consideration here. But all fear is not excluded, because his displeasure is itself the natural proper object of fear. Reverence, ambition of his love and approbation, delight in the hope or consciousness of it, come likewise into this definition of the love of God; because he is the natural object of all those affections or movements of mind, as really as he is the object of the affection, which is in the strictest sense called love; and all of them equally rest in him, as their end. And they may all be understood to be implied in these words of our Saviour, without putting any force upon them: for he is speaking of the love of God and our neighbour, as containing the whole of piety and virtue.

It is plain that the nature of man is so constituted, as to feel certain affections upon the sight or contemplation of certain objects. Now the very notion of affection implies resting in its object as an end. And the particular affection to good characters, reverence and moral love of them, is natural to all those who have any degree of real goodness in themselves. This will be illustrated by the description of a perfect character in a creature; and by considering the manner, in which a good man in his presence would be affected towards such a character. He would of course feel the affections of love, reverence, desire of his approbation, delight in the hope or consciousness of it. And surely all this is applicable, and may be brought up to that Being, who is infinitely more than an adequate object of all those affections; whom we are commanded to *love with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind*. And of these regards towards Almighty God, some are more particularly suitable to and becoming so imperfect a creature as man, in this mortal state we are passing through; and some of them, and perhaps other excesses of the mind, will be the employment and happiness of good men in a state of perfection.

This is a general view of what the following discourse will contain. And it

is manifest the subject is a real one: there is nothing in it enthusiastical or unreasonable. And if it be indeed at all a subject, it is one of the utmost importance.

As mankind have a faculty by which they discern speculative truth; so we have various affections towards external objects. Understanding and temper, reason and affection, are as distinct ideas, as reason and hunger; and one would think could no more be confounded. It is by reason that we get the ideas of several objects of our affections: but in these cases, reason and affection are no more the same, than sight of a particular object, and the pleasure or uneasiness consequent thereupon, are the same. Now, as reason tends to and rests in the discernment of truth, the object of it; so the very nature of affection consists in tending towards, and resting in, its objects as an end. We do indeed often in common language say, that things are loved, desired, esteemed, not for themselves, but for somewhat further, somewhat out of and beyond them: yet, in these cases, whoever will attend, will see, that these things are not in reality the objects of the affections, *i. e.* are not loved, desired, esteemed, but the somewhat further and beyond them. If we have no affections which rest in what are called their objects, then what is called affection, love, desire, hope, in human nature, is only an uneasiness in being at rest; an unquiet disposition to action, progress, pursuit, without end or meaning. But if there be any such thing as delight in the company of one person, rather than of another; whether in the way of friendship, or mirth and entertainment, it is all one, if it be without respect to fortune, honour, or increasing our stores of knowledge, or any thing beyond the present time; here is an instance of an affection absolutely resting in its object as its end, and being gratified, in the same way as the appetite of hunger is satisfied with food. Yet nothing is more common than to hear it asked, What advantage a man hath in such a course, suppose of study, particular friendships, or in any other; nothing, I say, is more common than to hear such a question put in a way which supposes no gain, advantage, or interest, but as a means to somewhat further: and if so, then there is no such thing at all as real interest,
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gain, or advantage. This is the same absurdity with respect to life, as an infinite series of effects without a cause is in speculation. The gain, advantage, or interest consists in the delight itself, arising from such a faculty's having its object: neither is there any such thing as happiness or enjoyment, but what arises from hence. The pleasures of hope and of reflection are not exceptions: the former being only this happiness anticipated; the latter, the same happiness enjoyed over again after its time. And even the general expectation of future happiness can afford satisfaction, only as it is a present object to the principle of self-love.

It was doubtless intended, that life should be very much a pursuit to the gross of mankind. But this is carried so much further than is reasonable, that what gives immediate satisfaction, *i. e.* our present interest, is scarce considered as our interest at all. It is inventions which have only a remote tendency towards enjoyment, perhaps but a remote tendency towards gaining the means only of enjoyment, which are chiefly spoken of as useful to the world. And though this way of thinking were just with respect to the imperfect state we are now in, where we know so little of satisfaction without satiety: yet it must be guarded against, when we are considering the happiness of a state of perfection; which happiness being enjoyment and not hope, must necessarily consist in this, that our affections have their objects, and rest in those objects as an end, *i. e.* be satisfied with them. This will further appear in the sequel of this discourse.

Of the several affections, or inward sensations, which particular objects excite in man, there are some, the having of which implies the love of them, when they are reflected upon. This cannot be said of all our affections, principles, and motives of action. It were ridiculous to assert, that a man upon reflection hath the same kind of approbation of the appetite of hunger, or the passion of fear, as he hath of good-will to his fellow-creatures. To be a just, a good, a righteous man, plainly carries with it a peculiar affection to, or love of justice, goodness, righteousness, when these principles are the objects of contemplation. Now if a man approves of, or hath an

affection to, any principle in and for itself, incidental things allowed for, it will be the same whether he views it in his own mind or in another; in himself, or in his neighbour. This is the account of our approbation of our moral love and affection to good characters; which cannot but be in those who have any degrees of real goodness in themselves, and who discern and take notice of the same principle in others.

From observation of what passes within ourselves, our own actions, and the behaviour of others, the mind may carry on its reflections as far as it pleases; much beyond what we experience in ourselves, or discern in our fellow-creatures. It may go on, and consider goodness as become an uniform continued principle of action, as conducted by reason, and forming a temper and character absolutely good and perfect, which is in a higher sense excellent, and proportionably the object of love and approbation.

Let us then suppose a creature perfect according to his created nature: let his form be humane, and his capacities no more than equal to those of the chief of men: goodness shall be his proper character; with wisdom to direct it, and power within some certain determined sphere of action to exert it: but goodness must be the simple actuating principle within him; this being the moral quality which is amiable, or the immediate object of love as distinct from other affections of approbation. Here then is a finite object for our mind to tend towards, to exercise itself upon: a creature, perfect according to his capacity, fixt, steady, equally unmoved by weak pity or more weak fury and resentment; forming the justest scheme of conduct; going on undisturbed in the execution of it, through the several methods of severity and reward, towards his end, namely, the general happiness of all with whom he hath to do, as in itself right and valuable. This character, though uniform in itself, in its principle, yet exerting itself in different ways, or considered in different views, may by its appearing variety move different affections. Thus, the severity of justice would not affect us in the same way, as an act of mercy: the adventitious qualities of wisdom and power may be considered in themselves: and even the strength of mind, which

this immoveable goodness supposes, may likewise be viewed as an object of contemplation, distinct from the goodness itself. Superior excellence of any kind, as well as superior wisdom and power, is the object of awe and reverence to all creatures, whatever their moral character be: but so far as creatures of the lowest rank were good, so far the view of this character, as simply good, must appear amiable to them, be the object of, or beget love. Further, we suppose we were conscious, that this superior person approved of us, that we had nothing servilely to fear from him; that he was really our friend, and kind and good to us in particular, as he had occasionally intercourse with us: we must be other creatures than we are, or we could not but feel the same kind of satisfaction and enjoyment (whatever would be the degree of it) from this higher acquaintance and friendship, as we feel from common ones; the intercourse being real, and the persons equally present, in both cases. We should have a more ardent desire to be approved by his better judgment, and a satisfaction in that approbation of the same sort with what would be felt in respect to common persons, or be wrought in us by their presence.

Let us now raise the character, and suppose this creature, for we are still going on with the supposition of a creature, our proper guardian and governor; that we were in a progress of being towards somewhat further; and that his scheme of government was too vast for our capacities to comprehend; remembering still that he is perfectly good, and our friend as well as our governor. Wisdom, power, goodness, accidentally viewed any where, would inspire reverence, awe, love: and as these affections would be raised in higher or lower degrees, in proportion as we had occasionally more or less intercourse with the creature endued with those qualities; so this further consideration and knowledge, that he was our proper guardian and governor, would much more bring these objects and qualities home to ourselves; teach us they had a greater respect to us in particular, that we had an higher interest in that wisdom, and power, and goodness. We should, with joy, gratitude, reverence, love, trust, and dependance, appropriate the character, as

what he had a right in; and make our boast in such our relation to it. And the conclusion of the whole would be, that we should refer ourselves implicitly to him, and cast ourselves entirely upon him. As the whole attention of life should be to obey his commands; so the highest enjoyment of it must arise from the contemplation of this character, and our relation to it, from a consciousness of his favour and approbation, and from the exercise of those affections towards him which could not but be raised from his presence. A being who hath these attributes, who stands in this relation, and is thus sensibly present to the mind, must necessarily be the object of these affections: there is as real a correspondence between them, as between the lowest appetite of sense and its object.

That this Being is not a creature, but the Almighty God; that he is of infinite power, and wisdom, and goodness, does not render him less the object of reverence and love, than he would be if he had those attributes only in a limited degree. The Being who made us, and upon whom we entirely depend, is the object of some regards. He hath given us certain affections of mind, which correspond to wisdom, power, goodness; *i. e.* which are raised upon view of those qualities. If then he be really wise, powerful, good; he is the natural object of those affections, which he hath endued us with, and which correspond to those attributes. That he is infinite in power, perfect in wisdom and goodness, makes no alteration, but only that he is the object of those affections raised to the highest pitch. He is not indeed to be discerned by any of our senses. *I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him. O that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!* (Job, xxii.) But is he then afar off? does he not fill heaven and earth with his presence? The presence of our fellow-creatures affects our senses, and our senses give us the knowledge of their presence; which hath different kinds of influence upon us; love, joy, sorrow, restraint, encouragement, reverence. However, this influence is not immediately from our senses, but from that knowledge. Thus
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suppose a person neither to see nor hear another, nor to know by any of his senses, but yet certainly to know, that another was with him; this knowledge might, and in many cases would, have one or more of the effects before-mentioned. It is therefore not only reasonable, but also natural, to be affected with a presence, though it be not the object of our senses: whether it be, or be not, is merely an accidental circumstance, which needs not come into consideration: it is the certainty that he is with us, and we with him, which hath the influence. We consider persons then as present, not only when they are within reach of our senses, but also when we are assured by any other means that they are within such a nearness; nay, if they are not, we can recall them to our mind, and be moved towards them at present: and must he, who is so much more intimately with us, that *in him we live and move and have our being*, be thought too distant to be the object of our affections? We own and feel the force of amiable and worthy qualities in our fellow creatures: and can we be insensible to the contemplation of perfect goodness? Do we reverence the shadows of greatness here below, are we solicitous about honour and esteem and the opinion of the world: and shall we not feel the same with respect to him, whose are wisdom and power in their original, who *is the God of judgment, by whom actions are weighed*? Thus love, reverence, desire of esteem, every faculty, every affection, tends towards, and is employed about its respective object in common cases: and must the exercise of them be suspended with regard to him alone, who is an object, an infinitely more than adequate object, to our most exalted faculties; him, *of whom, and through whom, and to whom, are all things*?

As we cannot remove from this earth, or change our general business on it, so neither can we alter our real nature. Therefore no exercise of the mind can be recommended, but only the exercise of those faculties you are conscious of. Religion does not demand new affections, but only claims the direction of those you already have, those affections you daily feel; though unhappily confined to objects, not altogether unsuitable, but alto-

gether unequal to them. We only represent to you the higher, the adequate objects of those very faculties and affections. Let the man of ambition go on still to consider disgrace as the greatest evil; honour, as his chief good. But disgrace, in whose estimation! honour, in whose judgment? This is the only question. If shame, and delight in esteem be spoken of as real, as any settled ground of pain or pleasure; both these must be in proportion to the supposed wisdom and worth of him, by whom we are contemned or esteemed. Must it then be thought enthusiastical to speak of a sensibility of this sort, which shall have respect to an unerring judgment, to infinite wisdom; when we are assured this unerring judgment, this infinite wisdom does observe upon our actions?

It is the same with respect to the love of God in the strictest and most confined sense. We only offer and represent the highest object of an affection, supposed already in your mind. Some degree of goodness must be previously supposed: this always implies the love of itself, an affection to goodness: the highest, the adequate object of this affection, is perfect goodness; which therefore we are to *love with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength*. "Must we then, forgetting our own interest, as it were go out of ourselves, and love God for his own sake?" No more forget your own interest, no more go out of yourselves than when you prefer one place, one prospect, the conversation of one man to that of another. Does not every affection necessarily imply, that the object of it be itself loved? If it be not, it is not the object of the affection. You may and ought if you can, but it is a great mistake to think you can love, or fear, or hate any thing, from consideration that such love or fear or hatred may be a means of obtaining good or avoiding evil. But the question, whether we ought to love God for his sake or for our own, being a mere mistake in language; the real question, which this is mistaken for, will, I suppose, be answered by observing, that the goodness of God already exercised towards us, our present dependence upon him, and our expectation of future benefits, ought, and have a natural tendency, to beget in us the af-
fection

fection of gratitude, and greater love towards him, than the same goodness exercised towards others: were it only for this reason, that every affection is moved in proportion to the sense we have of the object of it; and we cannot but have a more lively sense of goodness, when exercised towards ourselves, than when exercised to others. I added expectation of future benefits, because the ground of that expectation is present goodness.

Thus Almighty God is the natural object of the several affections, love, reverence, fear, desire of approbation. For though he is simply one, yet we cannot but consider him in partial and different views. He is in himself one uniform Being, and for ever the same without *variableness or shadow of turning*: but his infinite greatness, his goodness, his wisdom, are different objects to our mind. To which is to be added, that from the changes in our own characters, together with his unchangeableness, we cannot but consider ourselves as more or less the objects of his approbation, and really be so. For if he approves what is good, he cannot, merely from the unchangeableness of his nature, approve what is evil. Hence must arise more various movements of mind, more different kinds of affections. And this greater variety also is just and reasonable in such creatures as we are, though it respects a Being simply one, good and perfect. As some of these affections are most particularly suitable to so imperfect a creature as man, in this mortal state we are passing through; so there may be other exercises of mind, or some of these in higher degrees, our employment and happiness in a state of perfection.

S E R M O N V.

CONSIDER then our ignorance, the imperfection of our nature, our virtue and our condition in this world, with respect to an infinitely good and just Being, our Creator and Governor; and you will see what religious affections of mind are most particularly suitable to this mortal state we are passing through.

Though we are not affected with any thing so strongly, as what we discern with our senses; and though our nature and condition require, that we be much

taken up about sensible things; yet our reason convinces us that God is present with us, and we see and feel the effects of his goodness: he is therefore the object of some regards. The imperfection of our virtue, joined with the consideration of his absolute rectitude or holiness, will scarce permit that perfection of love, which entirely casts out all fear; yet goodness is the object of love to all creatures who have any degree of it themselves; and consciousness of a real endeavour to approve ourselves to him, joined with the consideration of his goodness, as it quite excludes servile dread and horror, so it is plainly a reasonable ground for hope of his favour. Neither fear, nor hope, nor love then are excluded: and one or other of these will prevail, according to the different views we have of God; and ought to prevail, according to the changes we find in our own character. There is a temper of mind made up of, or which follows from all three, fear, hope, love; namely, resignation to the divine will, which is the general temper belonging to this state; which ought to be the habitual frame of our mind and heart, and to be exercised at proper seasons more distinctly, in acts of devotion.

Resignation to the will of God is the whole of piety: it includes in it all that is good, and is a source of the most settled quiet and composure of mind. There is the general principle of submission in our nature. Man is not so constituted as to desire things, and be uneasy in the want of them, in proportion to their known value: many other considerations come in to determine the degrees of desire; particularly, whether the advantage we take a view of, be within the sphere of our rank. Who ever felt uneasiness, upon observing any of the advantages brute creatures have over us? And yet it is plain they have several. It is the same with respect to advantages belonging to creatures of a superior order. Thus, though we see a thing to be highly valuable, yet that it does not belong to our condition of being, is sufficient to suspend our desires after it, to make us rest satisfied without such advantage. Now there is just the same reason for quiet resignation in the want of every thing equally unattainable, and out of our reach in particular, though others of

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our species be possessed of it. All this may be applied to the whole of life; to positive inconveniences as well as wants; not indeed to the sensations of pain and sorrow, but to all the uneasinesses of reflection, murmuring, and discontent. Thus is humane nature formed to compliance, yielding, submission of temper. We find the principles of it within us; and every one exercises it towards some objects or other; *i. e.* feels it with regard to some persons, and some circumstances. Now this is an excellent foundation of a reasonable and religious resignation. Nature teaches and inclines us to take up with our lot: the consideration, that the course of things is unalterable, hath a tendency to quiet the mind under it, to beget a submission of temper to it. But when we can add, that this unalterable course is appointed and continued by infinite wisdom and goodness; how absolute should be our submission, how intire our trust and dependance?

This would reconcile us to our condition; prevent all the supernumerary troubles arising from imagination, distant fears, impatience; all uneasiness, except that which necessarily arises from the calamities themselves we may be under. How many of our cares should we by this means be disburthened of? Cares not properly our own, how apt soever they may be to intrude upon us, and we to admit them; the anxieties of expectation, solicitude about success and disappointment, which in truth are none of our concern. How open to every gratification would that mind be, which was clear of these incumbrances?

Our resignation to the will of God may be said to be perfect, when our will is lost and resolved up into his; when we rest in his will as our end, as being itself most just, and right, and good. And where is the impossibility of such an affection to what is just, and right, and good, such a loyalty of heart to the Governor of the universe, as shall prevail over all sinister indirect desires of our own? Neither is this at bottom any thing more than faith, and honesty, and fairness of mind; in a more enlarged sense indeed, than those words are commonly used. And as, in common cases, fear and hope and other passions are raised in

us by their respective objects: so this submission of heart, and soul, and mind, this religious resignation, would be as naturally produced by our having just conceptions of Almighty God, and a real sense of his presence with us. In how low a degree soever this temper usually prevails amongst men, yet it is a temper right in itself: it is what we owe to our Creator: it is particularly suitable to our mortal condition, and what we should endeavour after for our own sakes in our passage through such a world as this; where is nothing upon which we can rest or depend; nothing but what we are liable to be deceived and disappointed in. Thus we might *acquaint ourselves with God, and be at peace.* This is piety and religion in the strictest sense, considered as an habit of mind: an habitual sense of God's presence with us; being affected towards him, as present, in the manner his superior nature requires from such a creature as man: this is to *walk with God.*

Little more need be said of devotion or religious worship, than that it is this temper exerted into act. The nature of it consists in the actual exercise of those affections towards God, which are supposed habitual in good men. He is always equally present with us: but we are so much taken up with sensible things, that *Lo, he goeth by us, and we see him not: he passeth on also, but we perceive him not,* (Job, ix. 11.) Devotion is retirement, from the world he has made, to him alone: it is to withdraw from the avocations of sense, to employ our attention wholly upon him as upon an object actually present, to yield ourselves up to the influence of the Divine presence, and to give full scope to the affections of gratitude, love, reverence, trust, and dependance; of which infinite power, wisdom and goodness, is the natural and only adequate object. We may apply to the whole of devotion those words of the son of Sirach, *When you glorify the Lord, exalt him as much as you can; for even yet will he far exceed: and when you exalt him, put forth all your strength, and be not weary; for you can never go far enough.* (Ecclus. xliii. 30.) Our most raised affections of every kind cannot but fall short and be disproportionate, when an infinite Being is the object of them.

Y

This

This is the highest exercise and employment of mind, that a creature is capable of. As this divine service and worship is itself absolutely due to God, so also is it necessary in order to a further end, to keep alive upon our minds a sense of his authority, a sense that in our ordinary behaviour amongst men we act under him as our governor and judge.

Thus you see the temper of mind respecting God, which is particularly suitable to a state of imperfection; to creatures in a progress of being towards somewhat further.

Suppose now this something further attained; that we were arrived at it: what a perception will it be, to see, and know, and feel, that our trust was not vain, our dependance not groundless? That the issue, event, and consummation, came out such as fully to justify and answer that resignation? If the obscure view of the divine perfection, which we have in this world, ought in just consequence to beget an entire resignation; what will this resignation be exalted into, when *we shall see face to face, and know as we are known*? If we cannot form any distinct notion of that perfection of the love of God, which *casts out all fear*; of that enjoyment of him, which will be the happiness of good men hereafter; the consideration of our wants and capacities of happiness, and that he will be an adequate supply to them, must serve us instead of such distinct conception of the particular happiness itself.

Let us then suppose a man entirely disengaged from business and pleasure, sitting down alone and at leisure, to reflect upon himself and his own condition of being. He would immediately feel that he was by no means complete of himself, but totally insufficient for his own happiness. One may venture to affirm, that every man hath felt this, whether he hath again reflected upon it or not. It is feeling this deficiency, that they are unsatisfied with themselves, which makes men look out for assistance from abroad; and which has given rise to various kinds of amusements, altogether needless any otherwise than as they serve to fill up the blank spaces of time, and so hinder their feeling this deficiency, and being uneasy with themselves. Now, if these external things we take up with, were really an

adequate supply to this deficiency of human nature, if by their means our capacities and desires were all satisfied and filled up; then it might be truly said, that we had found out the proper happiness of man; and so might sit down satisfied, and be at rest in the enjoyment of it. But if it appears, that the amusements, which men usually pass their time in, are so far from coming up to, or answering our notions and desires of, happiness, or good, that they are really no more than what they are commonly called, somewhat to pass away the time; *i. e.* somewhat which serves to turn us aside from, and prevent our attending to, this our internal poverty and want; if they serve only, or chiefly, to suspend, instead of satisfying, our conceptions and desires of happiness; if the want remains, and we have found out little more than barely the means of making it less sensible; then are we still to seek for somewhat to be an adequate supply to it. It is plain that there is a capacity in the nature of man, which neither riches, nor honours, nor sensual gratifications, nor any thing in this world, can perfectly fill up, or satisfy: there is a deeper and more essential want, than any of these things can be the supply of. Yet surely there is a possibility of somewhat, which may fill up all our capacities of happiness; somewhat, in which our souls may find rest; somewhat, which may be to us that satisfactory good we are inquiring after. But it cannot be any thing which is valuable, only as it tends to some further end. Those therefore who have got this world so much into their hearts, as not to be able to consider happiness as consisting in any thing but property and possessions, which are only valuable as the means to somewhat else, cannot have the least glimpse of the subject before us; which is the end, not the means; the thing itself, not somewhat in order to it. But if you can lay aside that general, confused, undeterminate notion of happiness, as consisting in such possessions, and fix in your thoughts, that it really can consist in nothing but in a faculty's having its proper object, you will clearly see, that in the coolest way of consideration, without either the heat of fanciful enthusiasm, or the warmth of real devotion, nothing is more certain, than

that an Infinite Being may himself be, if he pleases, the supply to all the capacities of our nature. All the common enjoyments of life are from the faculties he hath endued us with, and the objects he hath made suitable to them. He may himself be to us infinitely more than all these: he may be to us all that we want. As our understanding can contemplate itself, and our affections be exercised upon themselves by reflection, so may each be employed in the same manner upon any other mind: and since the Supreme Mind, the Author and Cause of all things, is the highest possible object to himself, he may be an adequate supply to all the faculties of our souls; a subject to our understanding, and an object to our affections.

Consider then: when we shall have put off this mortal body; when we shall be divested of sensual appetites, and those possessions which are now the means of gratification, shall be of no avail; when this restless scene of business and vain pleasures, which now diverts us from ourselves, shall be all over; we, our proper self, shall still remain: we shall still continue the same creatures we are, with wants to be supplied, and capacities of happiness. We must have faculties of perception, though not sensitive ones; and pleasure or uneasiness from our perceptions, as now we have.

There are certain ideas, which we express by the words, order, harmony, proportion, beauty, the furthest removed from any thing sensual. Now what is there in those intellectual images, forms, or ideas, which begets that approbation, love, delight, and even rapture, which is seen in some persons faces upon having those objects present to their minds? "Mere enthusiasm!" Be it what it will: there are objects, works of nature and of art, which all mankind have delight from, quite distinct from their affording gratification to sensual appetites; and from quite another view of them, than as being for their interest and further advantage. The faculties from which we are capable of these pleasures, and the pleasures themselves, are as natural, and as much to be accounted for, as any sensual appetite whatever, and the pleasure from its gratification. Words to be sure are wanting upon this subject: to say, that

every thing of grace and beauty throughout the whole of nature, every thing excellent and amiable shared in differently lower degrees by the whole creation, meet in the Author and Cause of all things; this is an inadequate, and perhaps improper way of speaking of the Divine Nature: but it is manifest that absolute rectitude, the perfection of being, must be in all senses, and in every respect, the highest object to the mind.

In this world it is only the effects of wisdom and power and greatness, which we discern: it is not impossible, that hereafter the qualities themselves in the Supreme Being may be the immediate object of contemplation. What amazing wonders are opened to view by late improvements! What an object is the universe to a creature, if there be a creature who can comprehend its system! But it must be an infinitely higher exercise of the understanding, to view the scheme of it in that mind, which projected it, before its foundations were laid. And surely we have meaning to the words, when we speak of going further; and viewing, not only this system in his mind, but the wisdom and intelligence itself from whence it proceeded. The same may be said of power. But since wisdom and power are not God, he is a wise, a powerful Being; the Divine Nature may therefore be a further object to the understanding. It is nothing to observe that our senses give us but an imperfect knowledge of things: effects themselves, if we knew them thoroughly, would give us but imperfect notions of wisdom and power; much less of his being, in whom they reside. I am not speaking of any fanciful notion of seeing all things in God; but only representing to you, how much an higher object to the understanding an infinite Being himself is, than the things which he has made: and this is no more than saying, that the Creator is superior to the works of his hands.

This may be illustrated by a low example. Suppose a machine, the sight of which would raise, and discoveries in its contrivance gratify, our curiosity: the real delight, in this case, would arise from its being the effect of skill and contrivance. This skill in the mind of the artificer would be an higher object, if

we had any senses or ways to discern it. For, observe, the contemplation of that principle, faculty, or power, which produced any effect, must be an higher exercise of the understanding, than the contemplation of the effect itself. The cause must be an higher object to the mind than the effect.

But whoever considers distinctly what the delight of knowledge is, will see reason to be satisfied that it cannot be the chief good of man: all this, as it is applicable, so it was mentioned with regard to the attribute of goodness. I say, goodness. Our being and all our enjoyments are the effects of it: just men bear its resemblance: but how little do we know of the original, of what it is in itself? Recall what was before observed concerning the affection to moral characters; which, in how low a degree soever, yet is plainly natural to man, and the most excellent part of his nature: suppose this improved, as it may be improved, to any degree whatever, in the *spirits of just men made perfect*; and then suppose that they had a real view of that *righteousness which is an everlasting righteousness*; of the conformity of the Divine Will to the *law of truth*, in which the moral attributes of God consist; of that goodness in the Sovereign Mind, which gave birth to the universe: add, what will be true of all good men hereafter, a consciousness of having an interest in what they are contemplating; suppose them able to say, *This God is our God for ever and ever*: would they then be any longer to seek for what was their chief happiness, their final good? Could the utmost stretch of their capacities look further? Would not infinite perfect goodness be their very end, the last end and object of their affections; beyond which they could neither have, nor desire; beyond which they could not form a wish or thought?

Consider wherein that presence of a friend consists, which has often so strong an effect, as wholly to possess the mind, and entirely suspend all other affections and regards; and which itself affords the highest satisfaction and enjoyment. He is within reach of the senses. Now, as our capacities of perception improve, we shall have, perhaps by some faculty entirely new, a perception of God's pre-

sence with us in a nearer and stricter way: since it is certain he is more intimately present with us than any thing else can be. Proof of the existence and presence of any being is quite different from the immediate perception, the consciousness of it. What then will be the joy of heart, which his presence, and *the light of his countenance*, who is the life of the universe, will inspire good men with, when they shall have a sensation, that he is the sustainer of their being, that they exist in him; when they shall feel his influence to cheer, and enliven, and support, their frame, in a manner of which we have now no conception? He will be, in a literal sense, *their strength and their portion for ever*.

When we speak of things so much above our comprehension, as the employment and happiness of a future state, doubtless it behoves us to speak with all modesty and distrust of ourselves. But the Scripture represents the happiness of that state under the notions of *seeing God, seeing him as he is, knowing as we are known, and seeing face to face*. These words are not general or undetermined, but express a particular determinate happiness. And I will be bold to say, that nothing can account for, or come up to these expressions, but only this, that God himself will be an object to our faculties, that he himself will be our happiness; as distinguished from the enjoyments of the present state, which seem to arise, not immediately from him, but from the objects he has adapted to give us delight.

To conclude: Let us suppose a person tired with care and sorrow, and the repetition of vain delights which fill up the round of life; sensible that every thing here below in its best estate is altogether vanity. Suppose him to feel that deficiency of human nature, before taken notice of, and to be convinced that God alone was the adequate supply to it: what could be more applicable to a good man, in this state of mind; or better express his present wants and distant hopes; his passage through this world as a progress towards a state of perfection; than the following passages in the devotions of the royal Prophet? They are plainly in an higher and more proper sense applicable to this, than they could be to any thing

thing else. *I have seen an end of all perfection. Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after thee, O God. My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God: when shall I come to appear before him? How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! and the children of men shall put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be satisfied with the plenteousness of thy house: and thou shalt give them drink of thy pleasures, as out of the river. For with thee is the well of life: and in thy light shall we see light. Blessed is the*

man whom thou chooseth, and receivest unto thee: he shall dwell in thy court, and shall be satisfied with the pleasures of thy house, even of thy holy temple. Blessed is the people, O Lord, that can rejoice in thee: they shall walk in the light of thy countenance. Their delight shall be daily in thy name, and in thy righteousness shall they make their boast. For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy loving-kindness they shall be exalted. As for me, I will behold thy presence in righteousness: and when I awake up after thy likeness, I shall be satisfied with it. Thou shalt shew me the path of life; in thy presence is the fulness of joy, and at thy right hand there is pleasure for evermore.

S E C T I O N V.

FROM THE

SERMONS of JEREMIAH SEED, M. A. Rector
of ENHAM in Hampshire, and formerly Fellow of Queen's
College, Oxford.

S E R M O N I.

Domestic love and union recom-
mended and enforced.

[Preached in Twickenham chapel, 1741.]

PROVERBS, XV. 17.

Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a
stalled ox, and hatred therewith.

IT is hard to form a true estimate of
any man's happiness; because happi-
ness depends most upon those things
which lie most out of sight. Those joys,
like those sorrows, are most real, deep,
and strong, which run on in a silent stream
without making any noise: such are the
joys, which arise from easy reflections,
moderate desires, and calm content.

We see the false glare of greatness,
which surrounds some men, and are apt
to gaze at it with a foolish face of won-
der; but we see not those miseries, which
sometimes lurk beneath these pompous
appearances.

What avails all the pomp and parade
of life, which appears abroad; if, when
we shift the gaudy flattering scene, the
man is unhappy, where happiness must
begin, at home? Whatever ingredients
of bliss Providence may have poured into
his cup, domestic misfortunes will render
the whole composition distasteful. For-
tune and happiness are two very distinct
ideas; however some, who have a false
idea of life and a wrongness of thinking,
may confound them. For

*Better is a dinner of herbs where love is,
than a stalled ox, and hatred therewith.*
That is, it is better to have peace with-

out plenty, than plenty without peace:
that, where there is but a slender sub-
sistence, yet an uninterrupted interchange
of mutual endearments, among those of
the same family, imparts a more solid
satisfaction, than to fare sumptuously
every day, or to live in great and pom-
pous buildings, great and noble apart-
ments, every thing great, but perhaps
the owners themselves.

Those that are curious observers of
mankind, love to consider them in the
most familiar lights. When men are
abroad, they chuse to appear (whatever
they really are) to the best advantage:
but at home, their minds as well as their
persons are in a perfect undress and dis-
hable. The world is the great theatre on
which they act a part; but behind the
scenes, they may be seen in their proper
persons without any studied appearances.
Our domestic behaviour is therefore the
main test of our virtue and good na-
ture.

In public we may carry a fair outside;
our *love* may be not *without dissimulation*,
nor our hatred without disguise: but at
home nature left to itself shews its true
and genuine face, with an unreserved
openness; and all the soul stands forth to
view, without any veil thrown over it.
There we see men in all the little and
minute circumstances of life, which how-
ever they may be overlooked by com-
mon observers, yet give a man of dis-
cernment a truer opening into a man's
real character, than the more glaring and
important transactions of it: because, as
to these, they are more upon their guard:
they act with more of caution and of an
art, than of plain simple nature. In
short, our good will or ill breeding is
chiefly

chiefly seen abroad, our good or ill nature at home.

It were to be wished that we had more family-pieces preserved and transmitted down to us. The good public magistrate is an example of use to few only; but the prudent and affectionate father of a family is of a more general and extensive influence. For my part, I more admire Cornelius the centurion for that short sketch of his character in the Acts of the apostles, viz. that he was a *devout man, and one that feared God with all his house*; than if he had been represented as the most victorious general, that had enlarged the bounds of the Roman empire: for we learn from it this useful lesson; that the influence of a pious example, *like the precious ointment from Aaron's head*, descends downwards from the head of the family, diffuses itself over the main body, till it reaches the very skirts, the lowest members of it.

Our blessed Saviour had indeed no family to take care of: the whole world was his family; and all mankind, that heard and kept his sayings, were his *mother, and brethren, and sisters*. Yet some of his last thoughts were employed upon a subject, that will be sometimes rising uppermost in the minds of tender-hearted persons in their last moments, viz. "What will become of my poor defenceless relations? Who will keep them unspotted from the contagion, and preserve them unhurt from the injuries of this world, after I am departed out of it?" At the very instant that he expressed an unexampled love to mankind in general by dying for them; yet he exemplified a particular tenderness to his nearest relation. *When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved, standing by, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son. Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother* (whom you are henceforth to treat and honour as your mother). *And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.*

The pains that he sustained, the generous concern that he felt for the world, could not swallow up all his regards of a more private nature. As a man, he felt the sensibility of a son, and the soft and tender workings of nature within him; as a great and a good man, he restrained them within proper bounds, nor suffered them, at that great crisis, to break out

into any inordinate agitations of grief. He shewed us, that those affections, which nature has implanted, may be innocently cherished, till we are about to pay the last debt to nature; and even then exert themselves, provided they do not wound the peace of the mind, and shock the soul in her last moments, when she should be as much as possible rid of all the incumbrances of this world, to take her journey, with more ease and freedom, to another.

These examples, as well as my text, point out the reasonableness and advantages of domestic love and union, which shall be the first head of my discourse.

II. I shall lay down some rules to prevent disunion.

1st. Then, I am to shew the reasonableness and advantages of domestic union.

Quietness under one's own roof, and quietness in our own conscience, are two substantial blessings, which whoever barter for shew and pomp, will find himself a loser by the exchange. Abroad, we must more or less find tribulation; yet, as long as our home is a secure and peaceful retreat from all the disappointments and cares which we meet with in that great scene of vexation the world, we may still be tolerably happy: but if that which should be our main sanctuary from uneasiness, becomes our principal disquietude, how great must our uneasiness be! There cannot be a greater curse, than to have those of one's own household one's greatest foes; when we neither can live happily with them, nor must think of living apart from them. It was wisely ordained by nature, that whereas, if our benevolence should be equally strong to all mankind alike, it would be lost in a multiplicity of objects, and distracted in its choice; therefore our benevolence should be the strongest, where there were the closest ties of relation. Our benevolence is like attraction, "which increases as the distances diminish; and then operates most powerfully, when bodies make the nearest approaches to one another." It is the voice of nature, which calls within us, and reason seconds that call, when all other circumstances are equal, to love our near relations better than our neighbours, and our neighbours than mere strangers.

We then counteract the design of nature, and consequently of the Author of nature, when we do not endeavour to contribute as much as in us lies to their ease and happiness, with which our own is often essentially interwoven. "Is it not strange," (says an ingenious writer,) "that some should be so delicate as not to bear a disagreeable picture in the house, and yet force every face they see about them, to wear a gloom of uneasiness and discontent?" Yet this is no uncommon character. Nay, there shall often be a certain shyness, coldness, and fullness, in families, where there is no material ground of domestic animosities: and these differences shall be often the most lasting. For when anger or uneasiness immediately vents itself in words, the malignity of the passion is soon discharged; then it is most fatal and pernicious, when the wound rankles and festers within, when the mind preys upon itself, without disclosing the subject of its grievances.

The affronts, that are put upon us by strangers, make but feeble and languid impressions in comparison: but those that proceed from persons endeared to us by the closest relation of blood and kindred, wound us in the most tender and sensible part. There are two things, that affect the heart of every ingenuous man most deeply, *viz.* good-natured and generous offices from those to whom we have been injurious; and an ill-natured and unchristian treatment from those to whom we have been very kind and affectionate. As for the former, we can make a shift to bear their hatred, because we have deserved it: but we cannot bear their love; it quite confounds and overpowers us. And, as to the latter, it is certain, we can endure the utmost rancour and malice of others, much better than the least coldness and indifference from those to whom we have made it our constant endeavour to please. Very beautiful in this light are the words of the psalmist: *For it is not an open enemy that hath done me this dishonour; for then I could have borne it: neither was it mine adversary that did magnify himself against me; for then peradventure I would have hid myself from him. But it was even thou, my companion, my guide, and mine own familiar friend.*

Love is a tender plant, it must be kept

alive by great delicacy, it must be fenced from all inclement blasts; or it will soon droop its head and die. Indeed in general we ought to be very tender (we can scarce be too much so) as to what may affect another: otherwise we do we know not what. For no man can tell, unless he could feel for him, how much another may suffer by any unkind thing we say or do. An angry word shall give a deeper wound to some minds, than an injurious action shall to others, who are of matter too hard to make any impression at all upon them: and perhaps most men feel more in the whole of their life, from the scornful reproofs of the wealthy, the despitefulness of the proud, taunting sarcasms, and little instances of ill-will, neglect, and contempt, than they do from the more solid evils of life. These are the little thorns and briars, which (though men of a rougher make may make their way through them without feeling much) extremely incommode persons of a more refined turn in their journey through life, and make their travelling irksome and unpleasant: though they do not distress them so much, as the deep waters, that threaten to swallow them up.

But the unkindly behaviour of bosom-friends and dearest relations gives the most exquisite sensations of distress; as, on the other hand, a grateful humane deportment from them gives the finest and most delicate touches of pleasure. Every trifling service, that is an evidence and expression of their love, is received by us, as if it were a substantial obligation; and nothing can come from their hearts, but what proportionably affects ours.

To see a well-regulated family acting, as if they were one body informed by one soul, where if *one member suffers, all the members suffer with it*; to see those who are embarked together in one bottom, whose interests are inseparably united, and therefore whose hearts ought to be so too, dearer to us than any other particular objects in this world, and only not quite so dear as the good of the world in general, and our own happiness in the next; acting in concert, adopting each other's cares, and making them their own, uniting their friendly beams, and jointly promoting the common happiness: is a beautiful scene, and amiable even

even in the sight of that Being, *who maketh men to be of one mind in a house. How joyful a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!* To have those, who will receive us with an open-hearted cheerfulness, to whom we can discharge the fulness of the soul, to whom we can unburthen our cares; and by unburthening we lessen them (for sorrow, like a stream, grows weaker, by being divided into several channels): to have those with whom we can share our joys (and joy like light by communicating grows greater, and burns brighter); this, this is a happiness, which a forlorn individual must be in a great measure a stranger to, who stands single in life, without any support to lean upon.

But the greatest advantage of a friendly behaviour to domestics is, that thereby we contract and cultivate that habit of benevolence, which is a necessary qualification for everlasting happiness. We are apt to overlook and disregard our daily behaviour to one another in company, and the common occurrences of life, as little and trivial: whereas, though they are little in themselves, they are not so in their consequences: they are the very foundation upon which we must build an habit of benevolence. For an habit of benevolence must be contracted and kept alive, as all other habits are, by constant exercise. Now, our daily behaviour to our domestics gives us an occasion for an uninterrupted exercise of benevolence; and scarce any thing else does so. It is not then enough to say, or think, we will serve our friends and relations upon any material occasions; but, as for a constant complacency and obligingness in our common behaviour, to imagine, we may be dispensed with from observing it. For these acts of solid and substantial kindness we are seldom empowered to do; they are extraordinary emergencies, which do not constantly occur: and a settled bent of good-will must be acquired, not by what is occasional, not by what seldom occurs, but by repeated and numerous acts, by a daily and uninterrupted discharge of the common offices of humanity; by saying a thousand obliging things, and by doing, if possible, more obliging things than we say. It is not in every body's power, because he has not a fortune answerable to it, to form a standing habit

of charity by redressing the injured, relieving the distressed, and cherishing men of merit; but it is in every body's power to beget in himself this lovely disposition of mind, by studying to adjust his temper to theirs, with whom he lives, by complying with their humours as far as he innocently can, by soothing their distresses, bearing with their infirmities, and by incommoding himself in some points to gratify others. On the contrary, the indulgence of an occasional fit of ill-humour paves the way to an habitually bad temper. And to those who think it a small matter, Solon's answer is a very just one: "Yes, but custom is a great one." Did we seriously consider, that as often as we are exerting a spirit of needless contradiction, or venting an ill-natured wit to mortify those about us, we are cherishing a principle of ill-will, the very temper of the damned; it would, it is to be hoped, put some stop to this practice. But here the misfortune lies: men are more ambitious to display the abilities of the head, than to cultivate the good qualities of the heart: though the latter are in every body's power; the former few have any title to.

The habitual sweetness of our temper, or the habitual badness of it, does not then depend so much upon the great and surprising reverses of fortune, when the scene is suddenly shifted from prosperity to adversity, or from adversity to prosperity; as upon our behaviour under little and minute accidents, which befall us every day.

It may be observed, that (generally speaking) men of a generous education have a more refined humanity, passions more softened and civilized, than those in very low life, where rudeness, ill-manners, and brutality too often prevail. Mankind in this respect (some think) resembles Nebuchadnezzar's image; the head whereof was of fine ductile gold; but the lower parts of stubborn clay and inflexible iron. This observation does not always hold true; there being often great humanity and good-nature among the common people, and great cruelty among those of higher rank. But, as far as there is any foundation for this remark, it consists in this, that the gentry are obliged by their character, as such, to shew affability and com-

complaisance in their outward deportment; and these outward acts by degrees enter into, and refine, their very temper and frame of mind; and an obligingness in their whole behaviour, which is or ought to be their distinguishing characteristic, begets a corresponding sweetness of disposition within.

Be that as it will, did we often reflect, that to withhold from our domestics in the ordinary passages of life, and our daily intercourse with them, to withhold from them common civility, that debt, which we must be always owing, and always paying one another; is to withhold from them, what they have as much a right to, as they have to any property whatever; that every person, whether above us, or below us, has as well-grounded a claim to good manners from the laws of reason and religion, as he has to his estate from the laws of the land: and did we act agreeably to such reflections, our minds would be inured to humanity; the virtues of patience, long-suffering, mutual forbearance, would be every day called into action, and ripen into habits; till at last we arrived at a thorough good temper. From hence we may learn, how little reason any have to complain, that they have it not in their power to do good. Whereas, if we would act agreeably to those relations, some of which we must bear to those about us, *viz.* those of parents, children, married persons, superiors, equals, inferiors, friends; there is not a day passes over our heads, but we might contribute something to lessen the uneasiness, or promote the happiness, of those with whom we have to do; and by studying to promote their happiness, we mould ourselves into those habits, which are productive of our own, both here and hereafter.

SERMON II.

Domestic love and union recommended and enforced.

PROVERBS, XV. 17.

Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox, and hatred therewith.

THAT is, a moderate subsistence, where love is among domestics, imparts a more unallayed satisfaction, than

all the high and genteel enjoyments of life without that material ingredient of happiness. Sensual pleasures would be very flat and insipid, unless they were quickened by a mixture of social, friendly, and liberal pleasures, by the thoughts of imparting them to, and sharing them with, those whom we love and esteem. It is this that takes off or qualifies their grossness, and gives them their most endearing charm. One can scarce believe, that a rational man can love himself, without loving somebody besides himself. For he could find nothing in himself worth loving, if he were of that unlovely and unlovely temper. He would despise that little thing the heart, if it were entirely ingrossed by self, without a capacity to harbour any other guest, however deserving; just as he would a poor narrow cottage which could barely accommodate its sorry owner, but wanted room to lodge and entertain a friend. He who feels within himself a dull indifference for all mankind, must, one would imagine, have a thorough disrelish of himself.

In a former discourse I therefore shewed the reasonableness and great advantages of union, love, and a friendly behaviour among domestics. And in pursuance of this design,

I shall now proceed to suggest such considerations as may beget, preserve, and cultivate, such an union.

In the first place, do not delude yourself with any visionary notions of perfection. Consider men, as they really are, with all their numerous imperfections; and not as you could fondly wish them to be. The philosophers have remarked what a joyless unsightly figure the material world would make, if it were divested of all its adventitious ornaments, of all its lights and colours, which are appearances only, and not the real properties of matter. I am apt to think the moral world would make as unlovely an appearance, if we could view it in a true light, stripped of all disguises, and men should appear naked and unveiled, just what they are, with all their imperfections, all their little sinister views, and their follies, which they industriously cast in shades, exposed to public view. But God, who knows whereof we are made, and has ordered all things for the best, has wisely ordained, that our minds should not be transf.

transparent, nor our thoughts visible to one another, till we arrive at that place, where we shall have no paltry thoughts, no vain and senseless follies, nothing that need poorly sculk, and shun the light. The generality of men are like the generality of books, which we may often be obliged to have recourse to, and consult, upon particular occasions, but will not bear several views and reviews, and to be scanned over minutely by a critical eye: there are few men, as there are few books, whom the more we look into, the more we shall admire; the more we study them, the more graces and beauties, which escaped us before, we shall discover in them. Even those whom nature has shewn to the world as patterns of what it could produce, have yet some certain failures that reduce them, in some things, to the common level. If they have several excellencies to shew they are great men, they have several defects to shew they are but men. It is vain to imagine, we may meet with a person that shall please us in every thing: but this we may do, we may find out something that will please us in every person. A man is not fit to live in the world, who does not see several things, without seeming to see them; who does not see through the little by-ends and selfish views which men may have; against which he must use all the reality of caution and distrust, with as little appearances of it as possible.

There are not many who can stand the test of a close inspection. Their virtues shine upon us at a distance: it is upon a nearer approach that we descry their failings. The distant ground, which is adorned with variety of flowers, seems to be all in flower, and to glow with one continued and unmixed lustre; but, if we were upon the spot, we should discover several weeds interspersed amidst such a beautiful assemblage of colours. We may admire upon a slender acquaintance the saint, philosopher, and hero: it is upon a closer survey we always discover some tincture of the mere man to sully the brightness of these exalted characters. And familiarity, though it does not beget contempt, where there is true worth; yet always takes off admiration: admiration and wonder, always the property of raw unfurnished minds, unacquainted with, and unpractised in, the

world. Those who look into, and see through things, find nothing wonderful, but *One*; and that is he, who is *great, wonderful, and holy*: nothing is truly marvellous, but what he is, and what he doth. Nay the follies of men are often so strongly interwoven with their virtues, that we cannot gather up the tares, without rooting up at the same time the wheat.

Let us therefore, in the second place, learn to make proper allowances, and to represent their failings with all the softnings of humanity. Those that are continually complaining that *things run cross*, that the world is much *worse than it should be*, have very great reason to complain, that there is *one individual person in it much worse than he should be*; who cannot bear the accidents of life with tolerable patience, nor look upon mankind with common charity. Men are uneasy in themselves, and then shift the blame off from themselves upon the persons they converse with, and the times and places they live in.

Other mens follies and vices are always insupportable to those that are entirely devoted to their own. The fuller of imperfections any man is, the less able he is to bear with the imperfections of his fellow-creatures. True, regular, solid virtue is *not easily provoked*; but when provoked, *easy to be intreated*, knows how to connive at little follies, and to pardon even considerable errors: whereas, false virtue is peevish, exceptions, magisterial, hating to be put out of its own way; disconcerted with trifles, and unhinged by solid misfortunes.

Bear then with the faults of those about you, as you expect they should bear with yours; faults, which frail nature cannot well guard against, and which therefore good nature should overlook; be just to their merits, charitable to their failings, and tender to their misfortunes. All other ornaments fade and decay, and sorrow or age makes *beauty consume away like as it were a moth fretting a garment*: there is one only unfading beauty, one undecaying ornament, which is infinitely more worth than all the rest, and that is the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit.

Which brings me to observe, thirdly,

There is a particular tenderness due to persons under any recent affliction, not only that we may not seem to vex them, whom

whom God hath wounded, and persecute them, whom he hath afflicted; but because men are more susceptible of resentment, in proportion to the greatness of their distress. Men of a mind involved in melancholy, like objects of a dark and black colour, are more apt to take fire, than any other. Their distempered souls take umbrage sometimes, where none is given. All this we must bear with, and place to the account, not of their natural temper, but of their adversity, which imbitters their spirit, and discolours every object. Handle then gently a wounded mind, as you would do a wounded body, with all the tenderness you can; it will not bear too rough a hand. Remember, that a good-natured man cannot give pain, without feeling, in some measure, the pain which he gives. Nay, he cannot even see a person in pain, though he does not give it, without feeling, in some degree, what he sees. As the ancients held those places sacred, that were blasted with lightning; we ought to pay a tender regard to those persons who are visited with affliction: their persons are in some measure sacred, they claim a kind of reverence from us, and are to be privileged from any ludicrous or inhuman deportment. The very sight of them should strike us with a thoughtfulness on the changes of fortune in general, and beget in us that delicate feeling of their own case in particular, which we would wish for, if in the same disadvantageous circumstances. A general civility is a debt to all mankind: but an extraordinary humanity and a peculiar delicacy of good breeding is owing to the distressed, that we may not add to their affliction by any seeming neglect. The scripture, which is very particular in recommending every instance of fine humanity, gives us to understand how we are to behave to the unfortunate, in the words of Job, chap. xvi. 4, 5. *I also could speak as you do; if your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you: but I, instead of doing this, if you were afflicted as I am, would strengthen you with my mouth, and the moving of my lips should assuage your grief.*

In the fourth place, be sure to observe and practise the rules of good manners. By good manners I do not mean an insignificant punctuality, and a frivolous

exactness in the observation of little ceremonies; I mean something of an higher nature, I mean an assemblage of moral virtues expressed in our outward demeanour; a combination of discretion, circumspection, and civility, submission to our superiors, condescension to our inferiors, and affability to all; more especially a strict regard to decency in all our actions. For the rules of decency are the very outworks of respect, and when they are once broke through, the rest will soon be delivered up as an easy prey: and affection is oftener lost by little violations of the rules of decorum, than by any scandalous and enormous faults. The queen of Sheba, it is observed, was so amazed at the great decorum of Solomon's table, at the order and œconomy of his servants, the attendance of his ministers and their apparel, and his cup-bearers, that *there was no more spirit left in her.*

If you have any talent for saying keen and satirical things, be superior to the talent you possess, by shewing how little stress you lay upon it, when it comes in competition with your good-nature. Have no recourse to low stratagems, at once to cover, and yet discharge your little spite; which some do after the following manner. To attack men in public, without any provocation, for gross and palpable vices, is what they care not to do; because their good nature would be called in question, and their company shunned: there is a more artful way at once to gratify their ill-nature, and to avoid the odious imputation of it; which is, to dwell upon the indiscretions and unguarded follies of those they are conversant with, or to play upon subjects that require a very delicate hand to touch them so, as to give the party concerned no pain.

And yet these are the subjects which leave the most lasting sting behind. For such is the nature of men: they had rather be thought vitious, than ridiculous. They can bear you should hate them for their vices: they cannot endure you should ridicule them for their follies. For you do not place in the most insignificant light him, whom you do not look upon as beneath your hatred: then you must exasperate a man, when you scorn and make a jest of him,

as thinking him not of consequence enough to be hated.

The province of ridicule is very narrow. Vice is the object of our hatred; natural folly of our pity: acquired or affected folly is the only object of ridicule; when not content with what we really are, we are ambitious of being thought what we are not, or aspire at what we cannot be. We should be out of humour with ourselves, if we thought ourselves insignificant and of no consequence: and can it be wondered at, that we are out of humour with others, when they give us to understand by their behaviour, that we appear such to them?

Fifthly, Never make any reply to a person, till his passion abates, and the ferment subsides. For to what end should you expostulate with a man in a passion? That he may hear reason? But how can you expect he can hear reason, as long as his passion has got the better of his reason? How can you expect he should hear the voice of that charmer, whom anger has made deaf to all its remonstrances? Wait but till reason resumes its empire; and then speak to him, in the softer seasons of address, if there be any necessity for it, if the affair be of such an importance as to require a fair hearing. Otherwise, it is a matter of discretion to drop it entirely, lest his passion should rekindle; for reason is often retained on the side of passion, and is set at work, in our cooler hours, to find out specious excuses for what we said or did in the heat and warmth of temper. And as you are not to reprimand any person during the emotion of his passion, so neither are you to do it during the emotion of your own. What the philosopher said about punishing, you may apply here, and say, "I would chide you, if I were not angry." For you will be apt to carry things too far: or if you did not, yet what you say will have less weight, as it will be looked upon as the result of rage and fury, not the product of cool sedate reason.

Forearm yourself with this persuasion, and keep it present upon your mind; that whatever any occasional fit of the spleen suggests, is either wholly or in some measure wrong; that what is really bad, it exhibits doubly bad, and what is not bad, it represents so: that you no more see things as they are, in a settled melancholy gloom, than you do in a dazzling

glare; that it is very blind and undistinguishing, apt to discharge itself upon friend or foe indiscriminately. We then the least suspect ourselves or our cause to be wrong, when our passions are the warmest: and yet then we ought to suspect both the most. A probability, that we are in an error, arises in proportion to the violence of those passions which hinder us from discerning the truth. But an apprehension or distrust, that we are so, lessens in the same proportion. Nothing is more common, than to hear persons, who have very material things to say in their own behalf, injuring themselves and their cause by mixing trifles with them: the reason of which is, that, though they are trifles in themselves, and appear so to every indifferent person; yet the warmth of passion in the party concerned magnifies them into substantial injuries.

Sixthly, Guard against pride, *from which cometh contention*. Persons of sense and virtue will seldom differ about things that are plainly essential to the happiness of the family: the greatest danger is, that they should disagree about trifles, where each will think they cannot give up the point without yielding the other the superiority: and the disagreement is often the sharpest where the difference is the smallest. Do not imagine that every person must exactly adjust their temper to yours in every point, so as to be your exact counterpart. If men recede in some particulars from their own inclinations to comply with those of others, there is some prospect that differences may be adjusted, and a good understanding kept up; like irregular stones that must have their unevennesses filed off, and their rough corners smoothed, before they can come together, and join to make a compact building, where there shall be harmony and symmetry of parts. There is but one Being, whose will we ought to submit to entirely and unreservedly; and his will is perfect unallayed reason, without the least mixture of caprice or humour. Vain is all strife for superiority, where the only strife should be, which should oblige each other the most; and the only power that should be lodged in any person, should be a greater power of doing good. Never strive to gain an absolute sway over any thing, but your own passions.

Be

Be not ashamed to confess you have been in the wrong. It is but owning what you need not be ashamed of; that you now have more sense than you had before, to see your error, more humility to acknowledge it, and more grace to correct it.

We double the greatest part of our faults, by the excuses which we make use of to justify them: excuses, which are a kind of patches, when a rent is made; far more unseemly and misbecoming than the rent itself. It is a sign a man is generally in the right who has the ingenuity to own himself sometimes in the wrong; that he is one of those whose fund of reputation is so great, he is not afraid of impoverishing it, by taking or losing a little from it: whereas those whose stock of credit and esteem is very inconsiderable, care not to own any thing at the expence of it. Observe what sin most easily begets you, whether it be moroseness, pride, passion, covetousness, &c. and place there the strongest guard, where your nature is weakest. Few persons have more than one predominant great vice: nature has guarded them very well in other respects; here they must take care to guard themselves. Particularly guard against any inequality of temper: for no man can have a true sweetness of temper without steadiness and a sedate way of thinking: they that seem to have it, have only, as one observes, a certain easiness, that quickly turns peevish and sour. Yet, when our affections begin to fall off, and cool gradually and insensibly towards any person, we are apt to imagine his are abating towards us. Just as the land seems to voyagers in a ship to be retiring from them when they are retiring from the land.

Seventhly, Take care to distinguish between a person's general standing sentiments of you, when he is perfectly calm and undisturbed; and his occasional sentiments when some cross accident may have soured his temper. Consider what he is for a constancy towards you; and not what he may be now and then, when his spirits are ruffled and over-heated. Unkindly thoughts of us, which vent themselves in unfriendly expressions, may be only occasional visitants, which tarry but an hour; whereas tender and endearing ideas may be the constant inhabitants of his mind. You must reflect that there

is no such thing as maintaining a friendly intercourse without overlooking things of this nature. He who thinks he has discharged every duty without any failure in point of kindness and friendliness to his domestics, has forgotten one duty respecting himself, that of self-examination. For the least reflection upon himself will serve to shew, that he has sometimes said things that had better been left unsaid; that he has been out of humour, when there was not a sufficient reason for his being so; and has gone too far when there was. A wife and a good man will therefore make proper allowances, and think, that, as a generous enemy may sometimes, through a flush of good humour, say an handsome thing in our behalf, and deviate into praise; so a firm friend, through a surprise of ill-humour, may let fall a disobliging expression. And whereas an hasty temper is immediately for proceeding to extremities, a prudent man goes more leisurely to work, and advises a friend; perhaps he has not said what has been reported; and if he have, that he speak it no more. And indeed, without such a procedure, all friendships would be precarious; they would lie at the mercy of those who were malicious enough to do us an ill office.

But above all, lastly, religion is absolutely necessary to preserve domestic union. For families are but little societies, as societies are larger families; and therefore religion, which is confessedly the best bond and cement of union in states and larger communities, is likewise so in little domestic governments: and family prayer is as much a duty in this smaller sphere of action, as public worship is a national concern. It is therefore incumbent upon those who preside over a family, to impress a sense of religion upon those who are beneath them: but to do that effectually, they themselves must be first affected with a serious and hearty sense of it. Their domestics will every day be witnesses of their ill qualities, such as anger, impatience, &c. It were to be wished, therefore, that they would let their good qualities, if they have any, shine forth before them. It must be with very ill grace they can complain of the disobedience of servants to them, who let them see by their whole behaviour, that they are regardless of their great and common master, their *Master which is in heaven*. Why

Why should they, whom much nobler motives have no influence upon, expect that the fear of offending them should restrain their dependents? People may complain of the badness of servants, the undutifulness of children, and the universal depravation of morals; but such complaints come better from any, than from those to whom that depravation is in a great measure owing by their carelessness and unguarded levity of temper, to say no worse; not having the prudence to keep their follies to themselves, but scattering the infection among their inferiors and attendants.

Be then seriously and solidly good yourself; and others, if they are susceptible of it, will learn goodness from you; and obey you more out of a principle of love than fear. Revere yourself, if you would have your inferiors revere you:—revere yourself—by exemplifying such a steady and regular practice of every branch of virtue, as will command their inward homage, the homage of the mind; and then outward marks of respect will follow of course without reluctance or constraint. Every one will reverence and acknowledge that worth, of which you seem insensible; and acknowledge and reverence it the more, because you seem insensible of it. We insensibly slide into the manners of those with whom we daily converse and constantly live: we catch the flame of virtue from them, by being always near to them. For goodness does not only communicate favours and kindnesses; it even in some measure communicates itself. Just as those who have been long among the most fragrant objects, not only are delighted with the odour that breathes from them: some of the very fragrant cleaves to, and remains with, them: they become fragrant themselves, by staying long among objects that are so.

Carry then their minds upwards from yourself, who are the head of a small family, to him, *of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is called.* Consider that the joint prayers of a family are as necessary to derive a blessing upon, or avert a calamity from, a family, as public prayers are to deprecate the judgments, or conciliate the favour of the Deity to a nation. So may he, who *maketh men to be of one mind in an house,* preserve you from all the miseries that

must fall upon a family embroiled, and a *house divided against itself!*

Thus, when you have tintured their minds and your own with religion, you will find that the union of souls was but begun here; it will be perfected above, where love and *charity never fail.* And death, which dissolves the union of soul and body, cannot dissolve the inviolable union of virtuous hearts joined together in pure unfulfilled friendship. Those who were lovely and loving in their lives, shall not be, even by their deaths, divided for ever. Separated for a while, they shall meet again, where there shall be no second separation, where they shall continue to be of one heart and of one mind.

SERMON III.

How far an affluence contributes to happiness considered.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, 1741.]

LUKE, xii, 15.

A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

IF a man's happiness (for life in this place signifies happiness) consisted in abundance, then a man would be happy in proportion to what he has: an assertion, which the compass of every man's observation disproves. We find several who have no considerable advantages, either of fortune, or honour, or power, contented and easy; and several, who possess them all, yet extremely discontented and miserable. This should incline us to think, that happiness is chiefly seated within; that the mind, as it is well or ill disposed, must endear the relish, or pall the flavour of every earthly blessing; that we must enjoy ourselves, before we can enjoy any thing else.

Men misplace their discontent: they are very well satisfied with what they are; they are only dissatisfied with what they have. Whereas the very reverse ought generally to take place, and the only desire which we ought to set no bounds to, is that of increasing in goodness. A slender allotment of worldly blessings will content an easy, modest, humble frame of mind: and no allotment whatever, no affluence

affluence how great soever, can satisfy an uneasy, restless, fretful temper, ever seeking rest and finding none, making to itself disquietudes when it meets with none, and improving them when it does.

A rational way of thinking is therefore an essential ingredient of happiness. We must possess ourselves with just apprehensions of things: we wind up our imaginations too high; and things, as they are in nature, will never answer to the gay florid ideas which a luxuriant fancy forms of them. The only expedient therefore is to take down our fancy, and bring it to the truth of things and the standard of nature. Unless we do this, we can never be tolerably easy: for our uneasiness, in the absence of such things, will be proportionable to the good which we imagine them to have: but our happiness, in the possession of them, will be only answerable to the good that is really in them. The consequence of which is, that the want of them may make us exquisitely unhappy; though the fruition of them would be but a slender addition to our happiness. Consult then your reason: cool unbiaffed reason will teach you the true intrinsic value of all the gifts of God, itself the most valuable of any. Whatever you admire beyond the real proportion of good that is in it, you will soon disrelish as much: but a just reasonable value will be as unchanging as reason itself: and time, which wears off the specious gilding of each imaginary good, brightens and improves the sterling lustre of real blessings. An undisciplined imagination may suggest, "O how happy should I be, if I could compass such a situation in life!" But if calm reason might be suffered to put in its plea, it would answer, "Why just as happy as those that are already in possession of it, and that is, perhaps not all." If you place your happiness in moderating your desires, you may be happy even now: but if you place it in enlarging your possessions, you would not be happy even then. For, however soon your views are terminated in life's low vale; yet, as soon as you stood upon higher ground, your prospect would be enlarged, and the scene open upon you. As fast as new streams of wealth flowed in, the channel would widen to take in more.

Very remarkable are the words of Solomon: *Every man, says he, to whom*

God has given riches and wealth, and has given him power to eat thereof, to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour: this is the gift of God; i. e. To enjoy is the gift of God, who is the author of every good gift, and the object of every grateful sentiment. He may give a man the power to get wealth, without the art of enjoying or becoming it: he may give him the materials of happiness, without giving him wisdom to be, what it only can be, the architect of it: for though fortune (a great fortune) may be the result of undesigning chance, or a concurrence of lucky incidents; yet happiness must be always, more or less, the product of design, thought, and reason. Hence it comes to pass, that those who are very fortunate, are not always very happy. We see how much a man has, and therefore we, some of us, envy him: but we see not (what is often the case) how little he enjoys, and therefore we do not pity him. And yet we might see it too, if we did but observe him giving perhaps evident proofs, that he does not enjoy himself by his constant endeavours to forget himself in variety of company and diversions, shifting the scene, and hurrying from place to place in such a perpetual motion of body, that nothing can exceed it, but, what it plainly shews, the restlessness of his soul: nothing more irksome to him, than being long at home, except it be the entering into a nearer home, his own breast. Alas! happiness is not a showy superficial thing, that plays, for a while, upon the imagination: real happiness, like real sorrow, lies deep at the heart: it is rooted in the ground of the heart; otherwise it would soon wither away, because it had no depth. Noise, hurry, and crowds, as they call off our attention, may suspend or dissipate real happiness or sorrow; but cannot give us a quick sensibility of either.

Govern then your inclinations and desires: *Keep your heart with all diligence: for out of it are the issues of happiness, as well as life; of happiness, which depends more upon the right inward frame and disposition of the mind, than upon any outward circumstances of life, be they never so advantageous. The world may talk loudly of, and envy you for your happiness: but ask your own heart; "Do you feel it there? If you do, whence " that continual succession of amuse-*
ments,

"ments, most of which are only so many
 "poor refuges from your own thoughts,
 "and some of which are only certain toils
 "gilded over with the specious name of
 "diversions, to make them go more
 "glibly down? If you do not, you are,
 "whatever your circumstances may be,
 "but a mere hypocrite in happiness; you
 "have the bare form and outside of it,
 "without the power, energy, and inward
 "feeling thereof: your happiness is
 "theatrical, and you are not the man
 "behind the scenes, whom you per-
 "sonate upon the stage of the world.
 "And indeed it is in happiness, as in
 "virtue. Those that are substantially
 "virtuous and happy, are not ambitious
 "of appearing such. They are content
 "with being such, leaving it to others
 "to study appearances, and to hang out
 "the gaudy sign of happiness, where
 "it is not to be found within, genuine
 "and unadulterated."

Let us suppose that all earthly blessings
 centered in one person, so that he had
 nothing farther to wish in this point; and
 what would be the consequence? Why,
 there is always a certain listlessness, that
 attends the fulness of prosperity; as there
 is a certain restlessness of mind, while our
 circumstances are necessitous. Fierce-
 ness of desire on the one hand, and a
 nauseous loathing on the other, lie often
 so near the one to the other, that it is but
 the thin partition of a moment, it is but
 an invisible line, that keeps them asunder.
 Men are always uneasy, till their desires
 are compassed, and every craving void
 filled up: and the moment that every
 craving void was filled up, and their de-
 sires compassed, they would sink into a
 flat indolence and a deadness of spirit.

To examine more fully into this point,
 I. I shall first range the pleasures
 under proper heads, and consider how
 much an affluence contributes to the en-
 joyment of each. And from thence,

II. I shall, secondly, inculcate the
 great duty of contentment.

Pleasure may be reduced to these
 heads: 1st, The pleasures of the senses;
 2dly, Of the imagination; 3dly, Of
 honour and esteem; lastly, Those of a
 moral and spiritual nature.

I shall begin with the pleasures of the
 senses. The rich man may fare sumptu-
 ously every day: but to fare sumptuously,
 and to fare deliciously, are widely dif-

ferent. He that feasts always, in reality
 never feasts at all: his appetite is palled
 by the repetition of the same entertain-
 ments. Whereas hard labour and ex-
 ercise make their homely but wholesome
 viands far more relishing to the poor,
 than all the high-seasoned delicacies and
 sumptuous entertainments are to the
 great. The clamorous calls of an hun-
 gry stomach are sooner appeased, than
 the squeamishness of a vitiated appetite
 removed. The greatest emperors, who,
 after a long, tedious, and laborious flight
 from a victorious enemy, have taken up
 with an ordinary repast, have ingenuously
 owned, that a simplicity of diet, thus re-
 commended by hunger and labour, has
 surpassed all the pleasures they have ever
 before met with from the refined and
 studied elegancies of a well-furnished
 table.

The truth is: The affluent must often
 use those things, viz. fasting and labour,
 out of choice, which the poor are obliged
 to by necessity: they must have recourse
 to abstinence, which is but voluntary fast-
 ing, and to exercise, which is but volun-
 tary labour; or, they will be sufferers
 upon the whole by their great and un-
 wieldy fortune. They will want that
 cheerfulness and even flow of spirits,
 which temperance, successive industry,
 and ease, beget, ill-exchanged for epicu-
 rism and sensuality.

Health is a temporal blessing, which
 must give a relish to every other: a
 blessing, however, that we never know
 the full value of, till we are deprived of
 it: like objects less apparent, when too
 near the eye, it must be held off from us,
 to be seen, to greater advantage, by us.
 Yet this blessing, the foundation of all
 the rest, is ofteneft the lot of an honest
 and industrious competency.

The same Author, the Author of
 nature and the scriptures, has expressly
 enjoined, that he *who will not work* or
 employ himself, whether he be rich or
 poor, *shall not eat*. And it is the same
 thing, whether the inability arises from
 want of food, or want of health and appetite.

The next pleasures that fall under con-
 sideration are, 2dly, those of the imagi-
 nation, viz. order, beauty, regularity.
 And certainly affluence must be owned to
 be very instrumental in supplying us with
 pleasures of this kind. It can command
 noble buildings, regular apartments, curi-
 ous

ous pictures, statues, gardens, and what not.

But *what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?* And what pleasure therefore hath the owner more than the spectator, provided their taste be equal? The notion of having a property in these things exclusive of others may feed the vanity of the proprietor, but does not administer any natural pleasure. For all the natural pleasure results from a sense to discern, and a taste to be affected with beauty of this kind. And as long as a man of moderate fortune keeps the idea of property from intruding and mixing with delights of this nature, he may command as much satisfaction, as men of overgrown estates. Nay, he may look upon the rich as a kind of benefactors, who have supplied him with a set of pleasing images, and beautified the prospect all around him, by polishing the rougher draughts of nature with all the additional advantages of art. Other people may have all the ostentation of life; but he has all the real entertainments of it. He may reap all the delight, which magnificent buildings, costly furniture, expensive curiosities, and fine drefs, are by nature fitted to yield: and as to any further delight which results from property, the pleasure of the proprietor, to whom they are become familiar, depends, in a great measure, upon the relish of the spectator, who applauds his judicious fancy in the choice of his ornaments. His happiness consists in comparing himself with others, whom he imagines less happy in this respect: and for the same reason another's magnificence must be his uneasiness, when he compares himself with those who outshine him in the elegant accommodations of life. Thus do men multiply to themselves causes of misery, by misplaced affections and a vitiated taste: and there have been those who have disrelished all the substantial enjoyments of life, merely because another has appeared adorned with a redundancy of costly ornaments, which they could not purchase. Where *vanity* (especially the little senseless vanity of drefs) is, there is always, its inseparable attendant, *vexation of spirit*: so justly has Solomon joined them together. An expensive trifle has begot in them an undue complacency in themselves, mixed

with a contempt for others: whereas the want of it would have disconcerted them as much as a solid misfortune. So light, so insignificant, are the things which disturb or overjoy a mind that calls itself rational. And they who can laugh at a child for being pleased with, or crying because it cannot have, a feather or a gewgaw, betray an equally childish fancy in being discomposed for the want of mere playthings, of another kind; forgetful of that which is to be *loved above gold and precious stones*: fond of every thing rare and uncommon, except what is the most valuable rarity of all uncommon worth, exalted piety and virtue, which the influence of their bad example tends to make more rare and uncommon. Every other distinction in life which may set them above the vulgar herd, glitters in their eye: this distinction only has often no charms for them: a distinction, however, of infinitely more worth than all the rest, which will set them above the rest of the world, when all other distinctions are lost to all eternity. Whatever beauty, symmetry, and regularity in houses or gardens an affluence may procure; there is one symmetry and regularity, which ought not to be forgotten, the regularity of our lives and manners, the beauty of affections well ordered, that harmony and order within, without which no order or proportion in things external can make us happy.

The truth is, nature has pointed out to us a set of delights, easy, cheap, and serene: but a distempered imagination has substituted in their room those that are difficult of access, and unsatisfactory in the possession. Nature has made the most beautiful and pleasing objects the most common, which several overlook, merely because they are so. They love to strike into new tracts of pleasure, despising those in which the bulk of mankind can walk as themselves; and are so afraid of falling in with the vulgar taste, that they refine themselves into one plainly unnatural. What are all the beauties which genius can invent, art exhibit, or riches purchase, when put in competition with the august spectacle of the sun, in the vernal season arising in its full strength, gladdening the animal creation, brightening every object, itself the brightest; in comparison of which all human

glories, like the stars, hide their diminished heads, or rather like a sickly lamp, when confronted with it, have no glory, by reason of the glory which EXCELETH? Yet how many prefer the dull luxury of a soft bed and ease, to this delightful, but, alas! too early scene?

The next pleasures are, thirdly, those of esteem and honour.

We are apt to consider men, not as they are in themselves, but as they are gilded and set off to advantage by their fortune: whereas did we view them apart from their circumstances, instead of admiring their greatness, we should, sometimes at least, find occasion to pity their littleness. It is surprising to observe, what a wide disproportion of respect is paid to a man, by rational creatures, according as he has more or less of money. *When the rich man speaketh*, saith the wise son of Sirach, *every man holdeth his tongue, and lo! what he sayeth*, enforced with the substantial eloquence of an ample estate, *is extolled to the clouds. But if a poor man speaketh, they are ready to say, What fellow is this?*

Yet, to balance the account, let it be observed, that as for men of superior sense, they see through, and heartily despise, all the officious complaisance that is paid to their quality, and not to their person. No honour, no praise, but what comes from the heart of the speaker, can penetrate to theirs, and raise any delicate sensations of pleasure there. They laugh at all the embarrassments of greatness, which, like robes of state, must be worn on some public occasions, but are always heavy, cumbrous, and unwieldy: they never enjoy themselves, unless in the milder lights of life, when they put them off, and are in an undress, free, and disengaged, losing the great man in the friend. Their true greatness is, that they are superior to the greatness which they possess, and can see into the littleness of it, when unaccompanied with a liberal mind and enlarged affections.

And, as to men of another turn, let it be observed, that the least neglect, nay even the omission of a ceremony, shall extremely disconcert some who have been trained up with high notions of the deference due to them, and are big with the sentiments of their own dignity. Of this we have a pregnant instance in Haman. *After he had summed up all his*

wealth, honour, and greatness, he concludes: *Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai sitting at the gate*, that is, not rising to make this court, and pay homage to him. This disrespect and slight put upon him could counter-balance all his pleasures. To see another put above one, and a distinction made, where we can see no difference, however trivial and imaginary an ill, yet galls a man of high spirit more than some substantial grievances do the meek and humble. Those who are destitute of true greatness put one in mind of those animals which are discerned by the help of glasses: little and despicable in themselves, they must be magnified to appear considerable: their greatness may be properly said to be extrinsic: for they would escape the eye of the world, and dwindle into nothing, through a natural medium, without something foreign and extrinsic to them, to aggrandise and enlarge them.

In the affluence of fortune, where every humour is indulged, every desire gratified without control, there the least disappointments, the least provocation, will disturb a man: he can scarce brook any affront, the natural consequence of an uninterrupted self-indulgence. For the more he indulges himself in the pleasurable things of life, the less he will think of his not deserving them; and the less he thinks of his not deserving them, the less will be his humility: till sickness, pain, and anguish, (no flatterers they, who only speak smooth things; they speak home to his bosom, and give him a feeling conviction of what he is) lower his swelling ideas, and reduce the exorbitant power of his passions. At that instant he feels, how little they avail to ease an aching heart, to stifle the clamours of his conscience, and to suspend, what they often hasten, his doom. At that instant he will look upon them in that light, in which a great man of a neighbouring country did some extraordinary mark of distinction and honour sent him, as he lay on his death-bed. "Alas!" (says he, looking coldly upon it), "this is a mighty fine thing here in this country: but I am just bound for a country, where it will be of no service to me." Nothing would be more effectual to moderate our desires for things of this nature, now we are alive and well, than seriously to reflect, in what light they

will appear to us, just at the article of death. No one can be more miserable than the man of the world, who seldom thought of any thing beyond it, when he is not to continue any longer in it. Then such sentiments as these, just at all times, will be almost unavoidable to him at this dread juncture. "Alas! that mere trifles in comparison of what is immediately to follow, mere shadows of the good things to come hereafter, should so far engage my thoughts, as to make that glory, which is of an *exceeding* and *eternal weight* in itself, have little or no weight at all with me."

The last pleasures I proposed to consider are those of a moral and spiritual nature.

These are indeed the most solid satisfactions. And he is not possessed of true wisdom and virtue, who does not look upon every thing else as beneath them. Yet these pleasures lie open to men of every condition in life. It is true, a benevolent man in low circumstances cannot be as beneficial to the world, as he would be, if he adorned a higher station. But though it might be better for the world that he had an ample sphere of action; yet it will be the same thing to him at the last final adjustment of rewards and punishments. For he who has (the only thing in his power) an hearty inclination to do more good, shall not lose his reward for want of (what was not in his power) an opportunity to express that good-will by his actions.

Our virtue is at least as much endangered by opulence, which administers numberless incentives to luxury, and temptations to insolence, as it is by poverty. Nay, some who before seemed to want nothing but an ample fortune, as soon as they have acquired that, have from that time wanted almost every thing else to make them valuable. The heat and warmth of prosperity has called forth those vices, which lay dormant before under the rigour of poverty. What numbers have shortened their days by abandoning themselves to all the unmanly pleasures of a dissolute life; who, if they had not been born to an affluent independent state, might have made a distinguished figure in the world? If they had not had a fortune to support their follies, and keep pace with their lewd desires, they might have thought it ne-

cessary to lay in a stock of moral and intellectual endowments. No wonder some annex the idea of valuableness and worth to riches, and of despicableness and contempt to poverty: they are in the right to value themselves upon, what is the only valuable thing they have, their great wealth.

After all, I am far from denying, that riches give us larger opportunities of doing good: that several make this use of them, and improve their own, by enlarging the common stock of happiness; their religion, like the altar, that sanctified the gold, stamping a value upon, and dignifying their fortune. That their greatness is not like that of old Gothic buildings, an irregular, encumbered magnificence, where there is nothing easy, unaffected, and natural; but every thing shews a stiff awkward state, and an ostentatious pride: no, it resembles the buildings of ancient taste, where all things were simple, just, and conformable to truth, and therefore beautiful and great; where that which was ornamental, was also commodious and useful. But this I affirm, that unless we guard against criminal excesses, riches will, as the apostle expresses it, *bring us into a snare, and into many hurtful and foolish lusts, and such as drown men in perdition.*

The least glance of reflection may serve to shew, that happiness, in a great measure, consists in subduing each fierce, turbulent, and exorbitant passion; which they are not the most likely to do, who have the means in their hands, of gratifying every one of them: not to mention, that to set one's heart upon the blandishments of life, (which is too often the case of those whose fortune can command them), is to give the terrors of death a much keener edge.

But this brings me to my

II. Second general head, which is to inculcate the great duty of contentment.

The first reason for which is, That happiness is more equally dealt, than we, in our melancholy hours, are apt to imagine. This is certain; that one part of the world are tolerably easy, under such circumstances as would be insupportable to the other. And some have made it a question, whether riches do not create more wants than they satisfy. For none seem to be more contented, than those that are entirely unacquainted with the delicacies

delicacies of life. Thus there is even here, in many cases, though not in all, that regular adjustment of inequalities; that he that has gathered much of the materials of happiness, *should have nothing over*; and he that has gathered little, *should have no lack*. If the poor envy the rich, as exempt from that drudgery to which they are subject; the rich may sometimes, with more justice, envy the industrious and temperate poor: because that very drudgery prevents that idle swarm of restless thoughts, that spleen, distaste, and want of health, which high enjoyment of life, luxury, and inaction sometimes breed in them. The labour of the body ingrosses the attention of the mind, which otherwise museth upon many things; and therefore hinders them from dwelling upon, and consequently heightening real misfortunes, or from forming to themselves imaginary grievances. Thus it procures them peace of mind, as well as health of body. And happiness, as far as attainable here below, consists "in peace of mind, health of body, and competency of fortune." Nay they bid as fair for a competency, as the rich themselves, if not fairer. For their labour, to which they are constantly inured, takes up their thoughts, and hinders them from straggling abroad, from making idle excursions, and creating fantastic wants; wants, which nature never designed. Now, these imaginary wants are often more vexatious to the opulent, than real wants are to the poor. For real and natural wants are soon supplied, a very little sufficing nature: whereas the wants of an irregular roving imagination are endless. Hence the opulent are sometimes very unhappy; as they are at leisure to frame a thousand chimerical desires. And accordingly they often connect the ideas of grandeur, retinue, costly eating and drinking, sumptuous villas, statues, paintings, with the idea of happiness: ideas, between which there is no natural connection; since many are happy without them, and several miserable with them: ideas, which foolish man has put together; but which nature and the wise Author of nature ever intended to keep asunder. They very ingeniously have contrived an inexhaustible number of wants, which require as inexhaustible a fund of wealth to supply them. If they are supplied, it is

but vanity, and contributes very little to their real enjoyments: as soon as the gloss of novelty is worn off, they become tasteless and insipid. If they are not supplied, it is a vexation of spirit, and a perpetual source of uneasiness. They have very often so joined and rivetted together the ideas of grandeur and happiness, that they cannot retrench their pomp and equipage, even when their fortune is considerably impaired. They must, through an ambitious poverty, maintain the shew, when the substance is gone. Their joys are pompous and visible, but false and fantastic; their cares secret and concealed, but real and solid. Riches, by making pleasures familiar to them, flatten their relish for them, but give a keener edge to every pain which they must feel as well as other men: they dull their enjoyments, but point and quicken the sense of anguish and affronts.

To proceed to other instances, where happiness is not so unequally dispensed as we may be inclined to think: If the prosperous villain looks down with contempt upon the virtuous sufferer; the virtuous sufferer, in his turn, may pity the prosperous villain. For he finds within himself that genuine feeling of real worth, that delightful self-consciousness of virtue, which whoever sincerely feels, can never be at the lowest ebb of fortune, in the most complicated distress, entirely miserable. He can relish his very being; he finds all right at home in his own breast; his self, his nature, is agreeable; and God, the author of nature, is his friend. But the prosperous villain, whenever he has any intervals (as he must have intervals) for serious reflection, must meet a distempered and wounded spirit within him; he must feel a self-abhorrence, a self-loathing, a total disrelish of himself; perhaps a greater, but certainly a more lasting, torment, than any he can inflict. He that, out of a principle of malicious wickedness, does ill, must be conscious he deserves ill: and he that is conscious he deserves ill, must expect to meet with his deserts from that Being, who *will render to every man according to his deeds.*— But further,

If men of a fine imagination think themselves happy, that their lively sense and abilities let them into several pleasures, that the vulgar are strangers to; he

the vulgar are equally happy, that their want of delicacy secures them from numerous distastes and disgusts, which too elegant a taste exposes others to. If there are numberless refined delights, which, like the delicate strokes in painting, are too subtle, exquisite, and fine to affect men of grosser apprehensions; there are too numberless tender solitudes and soft distresses, of which they have little or no notion: so that the account is exactly balanced; a quicker sensibility of pain and grief bearing a just proportion, in men of finer spirits, to that of joy and happiness. If the learned value themselves upon their superiority of knowledge, the unlearned are as content, and sometimes more secure, in that ignorance, which as much contributes to the repose of the mind, as darkness does to that of the body. They travel on in the plain high-road of common sense; whereas speculative adventurers, by striking out into new and unbeaten tracks, bewilder themselves and their followers.

Single out whom you please; yet there are very few, whom we would exchange conditions with, all circumstances considered, in every particular. Such an one you take to be, in general, very happy: but, if you descend to particulars, and take into the account, it may be, his age, or his health, or his person, or his abilities, or his temper, or his behaviour; you would rather continue as you are, than make a thorough exchange. Some few there may be, who could wish they were not only almost, but altogether such, as some of distinguished virtue are: but, generally speaking, whatever seeming inequalities there may be, yet they are adjusted either by the real satisfaction, which virtue gives, or by the false pleasures which conceitedness and vanity afford its votaries.

Indeed, it is impossible, whatever we may fancy, we should wish ourselves to be any other person than what we really are. For it is too plain to admit of a dispute, that a man, in the exchange, proposes some advantage to himself; but what part of a man's self could be better, if his whole self was changed?

Secondly, the cause why men generally repine at misfortunes, is the very reason why they ought to be thankful. For the cause why we are so much discontented, is the uncommonness of our

misfortunes. If we were inured to grievances, if we were acquainted with grief, like veterans, that have already received many scars, we should bear up, with undaunted courage, against any new assaults: but being unaccustomed to hardship, being not trained up in the school of discipline and severity, the least disaster unhinges our minds: just as the least cold or inclemency of the air affects those who have been bred up with over-much delicacy and tenderness. A thousand blessings, which we have enjoyed, pass unregarded, merely because they are become familiar and common to us. One affliction, merely because it is uncommon, leaves deep traces behind it. Whereas the chief sensibility or repentment, that it ought to raise in us, is that of gratitude to God, for sending those chastisements so rarely. Thus, what is the cause of our murmuring, is in reality a just ground of thanksgiving.

I may farther observe, that we lie under a mistake, if we imagine, they are the great, weighty, and extraordinary misfortunes, that sour our temper. For these too rarely befall the generality of mankind to beget in them an habit of fretfulness. They are the little crosses incidents of life, some trivial neglect, that is shewn to us, some expression dropped in conversation that seems to reflect upon us, in short, any untowardly affair, that in the least crosses our inclinations, and does not exactly tally with our designs, which by degrees entirely imbitter the mind, and produce an habitual peevishness and acrimony of spirit. And for the truth of this reflection I appeal to the breasts of those who have the unhappiness to labour under this distemper. For these are things which do or may befall us every day; and therefore we must every day guard against any ill consequences they may have upon our temper, if we would preserve a perfect harmony within.

Another motive for contentment is, that the time is coming, and must shortly be, when, if we have retained our virtue and integrity, it will signify little or nothing, what else we have lost; but, if we have lost that, it will signify little or nothing, what else we have acquired or retained. However rugged and uneven the ways may be, yet it is some comfort, that

that, as one * expresses it, they lead to our Father's house, where we shall want nothing.

The 4th reason for contentment is, that, could we see through the whole contexture of things, we should find, we have as much reason to thank God, for what he hath with-holden from us, as for what he hath granted to us. We should leave it to him alone to dispense his blessings, as he pleases, who alone knows what will prove a blessing to us, in the final issue of things. The Deity may administer not what is palatable, but what is salutary to us, who have no health in us: and the longings of a disordered feverish soul are no more to be gratified, than the longings of a sick feverish body, without increasing our distemper, endangering our welfare, and making that which might have been cured, a *sickness unto death*. God's great will be done without reserve: for if ours were done without reserve, and each exorbitant with gratified, there would need nothing else to make us completely miserable. We often owe our happiness to this, that it is not in our power to make ourselves unhappy, which we seldom fail of doing, when it is. The severest curse that God inflicted upon the Israelites was—what? When he curbed and laid a restraint upon their inclinations? No: it was when he gave them up unto *their heart's desire*, and let them follow their *own imaginations*. We pray for honours: but God may with-hold us from honours, because he would not expose us to infamy; because he knows, whether those virtues, which flourished in the shade, might not wither away in the sunshine. This God alone knows: what falls within the compass of our knowledge to abate our fondness for honour, is, that unless a man is born to greatness, he seldom can become great, without being little first. I mean he must stoop to a thousand little-nesses and basenesses, which a generous nature disdains. To purchase honours, he must part with that uncomplaining virtue and integrity, for which all the honours in the world, the world itself cannot give him an equivalent. Honour and advancement here, are often, like death, the wages of sin; in the next world, they

will be the gift of God, and therefore the reward of virtue. Whatever greatness is founded upon any other basis, is not the greatness of a regular well-proportioned man; it is the greatness of a monster, where there is no grace, no comeliness that we should desire it; but every thing is misshapen, shocking, and deformed.

We pray for riches. But God alone knows, whether riches would not beget in us an undue opinion of ourselves, and lay us open to the impressions of flattery from servile dependents, that would practise upon our weakness; whether a continued succession of gaiety, pomp, and pleasure, might not dazzle the mind, and divert it from attending to *the one thing needful*, the pursuit of eternal happiness by the practice of piety and virtue; till we became, like the soil, from whence our riches were first dug out, unfruitful and barren. Add to this, that the same wealth, which sits easy upon persons bred up in high life, would be an awkward incumbrance to men exalted on a sudden from a low condition. So much reason is there for that prayer of the philosopher: "O God, avert from us what ever is evil, though we do pray for it; and grant us whatever is good, though we do not pray for it." Or in the comprehensive words of our blessed Saviour, *Deliver us from evil*; from evil in general, without specifying or particularizing what is evil; but leaving it to him, whose unerring wisdom can only determine in most cases, what is evil for us; and whose unbounded goodness will grant whatever is good to us, upon our serious, constant, and affectionate prayers to him. We should avoid all particularities in prayer. We may pray indeed for spiritual blessings and eternal happiness without reserve. But we ought to pray for temporal blessings under certain restrictions, for just as much fortune and health, as is convenient for us; upon the whole of things; submitting ourselves wholly to his holy will and pleasure, who loveth us as a father doth his own children, and can provide for us infinitely better; whose goodness is as extensive as his creation, and endless as his duration.

Here our mistake lies. We suppose that happiness consists in indulging each gay and florid fancy, each fond and effeminate desire, each dear conceit, that

* Archbishop Tillotson in his letter to Mr. Hunt. See his Life.

rises uppermost in our minds, when our spirits run high : and if this were true, it would follow undoubtedly, that an affluence was necessary to happiness. But God, who sees not as we see, knows that happiness is produced by correcting our vain imaginations, by disciplining our passions, and by bringing us to a just sense of himself, of ourselves, and every thing else, that concerns us. And let us co-operate with the Deity : let us look into our own hearts. " Are there no " clamorous passions there ; such as lust, " vanity, envy, covetousness, rage, which, " like so many wayward children, the " more they are indulged, the more " headstrong and refractory they grow, " distracting the parent's breast that " bred and cherished them ? If there " are, we may depend upon it, this " world cannot make us happy ; for " Heaven itself cannot make that man " happy, who has these sources of " wretchedness within him."

You must form a true relish of life, just as you would do of painting. You must not suffer your eye to be captivated by gay glossy colourings, by gaudy and ambitious ornaments, however they may strike and dazzle you for a while. You must dwell upon the more austere and manly graces, which never please upon a transient view, but when they have once pleased you, please you for ever after. The allurements of sensual pleasure are very striking, they catch the heedless and injudicious ; but the beauty of holiness does not, at the first glance, invite the eye : it hath something severe in it ; and you must dwell upon it, and consider it thoroughly, to be enamoured of those graces, which depend not on changeable fancy, but are founded on truth and a justness of thinking ; graces which will never please you while you are thoughtless, nor be disrelished by you, till you become so. However wisely and industriously you may pursue wealth, honour, or power, you can never be secure against a disappointment. There is one pursuit, in which you can meet with no disappointment ; and that is the pursuit of virtue : since every honest and spirited endeavour after virtue, is virtue in some degree ; which, if we do not slacken our endeavours, will lead on to a greater ; till our goodness *shines more and more unto a perfect day.*

S E R M O N IV.

The Case of Diversions stated, and the Necessity of an early Application to Wisdom shewn.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, March 2, 1739-40.]

P R O V E R B S, XVIII. 1.

Through desire, a man having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with wisdom.

DULL and insipid is every performance, where inclination bears no part ; but a strong desire to do our duty overcomes the difficulties that lie in the way to the doing of it, and the very *labour of love* is a pleasure. The heart will set every engine at work, when it is thoroughly engaged on the side of knowledge. No social diversion, no pleasure, will interrupt its pursuits ; because then it will be its greatest pleasure to *seek and intermeddle with wisdom.*

A total separation, however, from society, and the pleasures thereof, cannot be the meaning of my author, because that is contrary to the main tenor of the book of Proverbs ; and, besides, it is obvious to observe, that any one man's sense, however excellent, unless it mixes in society, with that of others, always degenerates into singularity and caprice.

In the following discourse I shall therefore,

I. Attempt to shew how far social diversions are allowable.

II. Point out the necessity of an early and close application to wisdom.

III. Subjoin some reflections connected with the subject.

I. Then, I am to shew how far social diversions are allowable.

In the first place, when there is no reason against any social (or indeed any other) pleasure, there is always a reason for it, viz. that it is a pleasure ; just as when there is no reason to undergo any pain, there is one always, why we should not, viz. that it is a pain. To suppose the Deity would abridge us of any pleasure merely as such, when it does not interfere with higher and nobler delights, is a notion highly derogatory to his goodness, who, in forming the world, seems, in

in some things, to have consulted our pleasure only, without any other apparent end in view.

Secondly, Diversions are necessary to deceive the cares, sweeten the toils, and smoothe the ruggedness of life. Man is a strange compound of greatness and littleness. There is something so great in our frame, that we cannot be happy without such substantial pleasures as will stand the test of our severest reflections: and yet withal something so little in our composition, that we cannot do altogether without such innocent amusements, as may take our minds off from their abstractions, and gently lead them into the more familiar traces of thought. And he who applies himself to his studies, or any other employment, with proper intervals of refreshment to recruit his spirits, will upon the whole do more good, as he bids fairer to prolong his life; than he, who, by too eager and uninterrupted an application, deadens his spirits, impairs his health, and wears out the very springs of life.

Further, diversions are necessary under any affliction. For the first step towards a recovery of happiness, is to steal ourselves gradually from a sense of our misery: and this is to be done, not by putting or keeping our thinking faculty upon the stretch, but by lulling our unquiet and too active thoughts to rest. And, let men say what they will, those hours which are wasted away in indulging an idle fullness, or a mooping melancholy, are no less placed to our account, than those which fly away unperceived in unthinking mirth and gaiety. It is the same thing, as to all religious intents and purposes, whether our time is mispent in vanity, or in anguish and vexation of spirit.

Thirdly, Diversions are requisite to endear us to one another. For it is a mistake to think, that the solid and material services we do one another are the only cements of social love and union; because we seldom have it in our power to do them; and, besides, they are expensive to the giver, and often uneasy to the receiver, who would not, perhaps, be obliged for very liberal gifts, to any but him, who *giveth liberally and upbraideth not*. But to comply with men's tastes, as far as we innocently can, in the little incidents and daily occurrences of

life, to bear a part in their favourite diversions, and to adjust our tempers to theirs; it is this that knits men's hearts to one another, and lays the foundation of friendships. On the contrary, the want of the little arts to render a man pleasing and agreeable, shall do him more disservice, than an hundred substantial and manly accomplishments can counterbalance or repair. And the reason is obvious. Few have perhaps understanding to discern, or candour to acknowledge, or generosity to reward, superior and solid merit: but the bulk of mankind can easily see, be affected with, and offended at, little singularities and incompliances in a man's behaviour, which lie exactly level to their capacities. It is an easy matter for a person of superior sense to soar above the common sphere. His chief difficulty is to let himself down to the common level, without which all his great knowledge will be, in some measure, useless. It is a sign of an undistinguishing judgment to imagine, that every thing that is small, is also trivial: that is trivial, which is of no consequence, whereas small matters may be the foundation of great ones, and by our behaviour in them, we form the mind to good habits, as I have shewn in a former sermon, or contract habitually bad dispositions.

But this puts me in mind, fourthly, That diversions are requisite to enlarge the usefulness and influence of a good character.

The man, who, though generally intent on great matters, yet can occasionally condescend to little things, without making himself little, singular in nothing but goodness, and uncomplying in nothing but vice; the man, who is in all things like unto us, sin only excepted, takes the most effectual method of making us like unto him in virtue. Whereas a person, who looks upon all pleasantries as criminal, whatever other duties he may practise, forgets one of the most material of all, that of gaining over others to the interests of virtue, by making it appear to be, what it really is, a lovely form. It is true, that, instead of paying an implicit obedience to custom, and blindly following a multitude to do evil; it is our duty to be humble enough to follow a good example, where it is, and yet brave enough to set one to the world, where it

is not. But singularity in matters of no moment discredits a man's virtues, and disqualifies him from being useful in affairs of consequence. It is natural for persons to imitate those whom they love : it would be therefore worth the while for the good to endear, by little compliances, their persons to the affections of mankind, that they might recommend their actions to their imitation.

Our blessed Saviour was so far from giving religion a gloomy appearance, that the first miracle which he wrought, was at a scene of festivity, where he *turned the water into wine*. And he, who gave and exemplified the strictest rules of life, gave a sanction to the innocent comforts and refreshments of it. His life was indeed the very beauty of holiness, a faultless form, finished, regular, and exact; yet softened by an easy sweetness and humility : an unaffected grace, without any forbidding mien, gave a powerful and endearing charm to it. When he was asked *why his disciples fasted not* ? his answer shews, that he was far from putting, at first, hard and rigorous duties upon raw and tender minds ; the obvious meaning of *not putting new wine into old bottles* ; a rule, which, if it had been observed by some well-meaning reformers among us, might have prevented that religious despair and frenzy, of which we have seen some shocking instances among their followers. Religious severities are certainly necessary in some degree, and under proper regulations ; but an excess of them, as we must have observed in some late examples, however it may have blunted the edge of the sensual appetite, has set a much keener edge on the spirits, and embittered the temper. If it has mortified the deeds of the flesh, and damped the inclination to animal pleasures ; it has produced far more incurable vices, viz. spiritual pride, rancour, and an uncharitableness, equal, at least, to that of the Papists. The same temper, which, in a continued high enjoyment of life, would discharge itself in sudden eruptions of rage and fury ; in too low and reduced a state of body, settles into a lasting peevishness, acrimony of spirit, and a splenetic dislike of every thing in this world, which surely is not very consistent with an affectionate love to the Maker of it. A dissipation of thought may be sometimes as requisite for the

over-pensive and thoughtful, as a recollection of thought is for men of quite another turn. That retirement, that application to meditation and reading, which may be necessary to reduce the volatile and airy into a sober and composed way of thinking, might drive others of a melancholy cast of mind into despondency, or even despair ; as the same diet, which would be very fit to reduce a pampered and over sanguine constitution, might be prejudicial to a thin, meagre, and consumptive person.

This caution, however, in general, is highly necessary ; That we ought to guard most against that extreme, to which human nature leans the most ; which is, by no means, that of an over-strict application to wisdom. For we are rather apt to lessen, than enlarge, the bounds of our duty ; and on the other hand to extend too far, than to shorten, the line of our liberty.

If it be asked, when we exceed the bounds of reason in pursuing our diversions ? I answer, If, after having made a party in some entertainments, the soul can recall her wandering thoughts, and fix them, with the same life and energy, as is natural to us in other cases, upon any subject worthy of a rational creature ; it is plain we have not gone too far. Under these regulations, we may be gay without folly, and virtuous without moroseness. But, if they leave behind them a disrelish for, and an indispotion to better things ; if the thoughts of what we have seen, heard, or done, intrude into our minds, quite dissipate our attention, and demand an audience of the soul ; we have acted contrary to the end of diversions, which is to unbend, and not to enfeeble, the vigour of the soul.

It is farther to be considered, that though certain amusements, the little play-things of life, may not seem entirely foreign to a more youthful age ; they certainly trifle away this life with a very ill grace, who stand just upon the verge of another : it shocks one almost as much, as to see a man playing and dancing upon the brink of a precipice, from which he is every moment in imminent danger of falling : — that, though some men place their chief happiness in diversions, yet they are, in themselves, strong proofs of human misery : for, if we were happy in

ourselves, there would be no occasion to divert our thoughts from ourselves. And which of the two is the most pitiable object; he who goes to other men's doors to beg his daily bread, or he who goes thither to beg his daily happiness, being too poor to furnish out his own entertainment? He, whose company is an insupportable burthen to himself, is very much obliged to the good nature and easiness of his companions, that it is not an insupportable burthen to them too.

There is such a principle of activity in human nature (especially in youth), that there is no great danger, we should fall into an habit of doing just nothing at all. The greatest hazard is, that we should contract an habit of doing nothing to the purpose, and of fooling away life in an impertinent course of diversions. An entire state of inaction is not to be dreaded; what we are to guard against is, that we do not fall into an easy insignificance of action, persevere in it, and then go out of the world with this melancholy reflection, That we have scarce done one action, for which it was worth coming into it: our lives being like *a tale that is told*; a tale harmless, it may be, inoffensive, and far spun out, but very insipid; trifling, and unmeaning, containing no useful moral, or rational entertainment; scarce worth the minding, while the thread of it was carrying on, ending as poorly as it began, and forgotten almost as soon as over.

II. But this brings me to my second head, viz. the necessity of an early and close application to wisdom.

It is necessary to habituate our minds, in our younger years, to some employment, which may engage our thoughts, and fill the capacity of the soul at a ripener age. For, however we may roam in youth, from folly to folly, too volatile for rest, too soft and effeminate for industry, ever ambitious to make a splendid figure, and to *shine before men*, but never endeavouring to *glorify our Father which is in heaven*; yet the time will come, when we shall outgrow the relish of childish amusements. And, if we are not provided with a taste for manly satisfactions to succeed in their room, we must of course become miserable at an age more difficult to be pleased. While men, however unthinking and

unemployed, enjoy an inexhaustible flow of vigorous spirits; a constant succession of gay ideas, which flutter and sport in the brain, makes them pleased with themselves, and with every frolic, as trifling as themselves: but, when the ferment of their blood abates, and the freshness of their youth, like the morning-dew, passes away; their spirits flag for want of entertainments more satisfactory in themselves, and more suited to a manly age. And the soul, from a sprightly impertinence, from quick sensations, and florid desires, subsides into a dead calm, and sinks into a flat stupidity. The fire of a glowing imagination (the property of youth) may make folly look pleasing, and lend a beauty to objects, which have none inherent in them: just as the sun-beams may paint a cloud, and diversify it with beautiful stains of light, however dark, unsubstantial, and empty in itself. But nothing can shine with undiminished lustre, but religion and knowledge, which are essentially and intrinsically bright. Take it therefore for granted, which you will find by experience, that nothing can be long entertaining, but what is in some measure beneficial; because nothing else will bear a calm and sedate review.

You may be fancied for a while, upon the account of good nature, the inseparable attendant upon a flush of sanguine health, and a fulness of youthful spirits; but you will find, in process of time, that, among the wise and good, useless good nature is the object of pity, ill nature of hatred: but nature beautified and improved by an assemblage of moral and intellectual endowments, is the only object of a solid and lasting esteem.

There is not a greater inlet to misery and vices of all kinds, than the not knowing how to pass our vacant hours. For what remains to be done, when the first part of their lives, who are not brought up to any manual employment, is slept away without an acquired relish for reading, or taste for other rational satisfactions? That they should pursue their pleasures. But, religion apart, common prudence will warn them to tie up the wheel, as they begin to go down the hill of life. Shall they then apply themselves to their studies? Alas! the seed-time of life is already past; the enterprising and spirited

spirited ardour of youth being over, without having been applied to those valuable purposes for which it was given, all ambition of excelling upon generous and laudable schemes quite stagnates. If they have not some poor expedient to deceive the time, or, to speak more properly, to deceive themselves; the length of a day will seem tedious to them, who perhaps have the unreasonableness to complain of the shortness of life in general. When the former part of our life has been nothing but vanity, the latter end of it can be nothing but vexation. In short, we must be miserable, without some employment to fix, or some amusement to dissipate, our thoughts: the latter we cannot command in all places, nor relish at all times; and therefore there is an absolute necessity for the former. We may pursue this or that new pleasure; we may be fond for a while of a new acquisition: but when the graces of novelty are worn off, and the briskness of our first desire is over, the transition is very quick and sudden, from an eager fondness to a cool indifference. Hence there is a restless agitation in our minds, still craving something new, still unsatisfied with it, when possessed; till melancholy increases, as we advance in years, like shadows lengthening towards the close of day.

Hence it is, that men of this stamp are continually complaining, that the times are altered for the worse, because the sprightliness of their youth represented every thing in the most engaging light; and when men are in good humour with themselves, they are apt to be so with all around. The face of nature brightens up, and the sun shines with a more agreeable lustre; but when old age has cut them off from the enjoyment of false pleasures, and habitual vice has given them a distaste for the only true and lasting delights; when a retrospect of their past lives presents nothing to view but one wide tract of uncultivated ground; a soul distempered with spleen, remorse, and an insensibility of each rational satisfaction, darkens and discolours every object; and the change is not in the times, but in them, who have been forsaken by those gratifications, which they would not forsake.

How much otherwise is it with those

who have laid up an inexhaustible fund of knowledge! When a man has been laying out that time in the pursuit of some great and important truth, which others waste in a circle of gay follies; he is conscious of having acted up to the dignity of his nature; and from that consciousness there results that serene complacency, which, though not so violent, is much preferable to the pleasures of the animal life. He can travel on from strength to strength: for, in literature, as in war, each new conquest which he gains, impowers him to push his conquests still farther, and to enlarge the empire of reason. Thus he is ever in a progressive state, still making new acquisitions, still animated with hopes of future discoveries.

Some may allege, in bar to what I have said, and as an excuse for their indolence, the want of proper talents to make any progress in learning. To which I answer, that few stations require uncommon abilities to discharge them well: for the ordinary offices of life, that share of apprehension which falls to the bulk of mankind, provided we improve it, will serve well enough. Bright and sparkling parts are like diamonds, which may adorn the proprietor, but are not necessary for the good of the world: whereas common sense is like current coin; we have every day, in the ordinary occurrences of life, occasion for it: and if we would but call it into action, it would carry us much greater lengths than we seem to be aware of. Men may extol, as much as they please, fine, exalted, and superior sense: yet common sense, if attended with humility and industry, is the best guide to beneficial truth, and the best preservative against any fatal errors in knowledge, and notorious misconducts in life. For none are, in the nature of the thing, more liable to error, than those who have a distaste for plain sober sense and dry reasoning: which yet is the case of those, whose warm and elevated imagination, whose uncommon fire and vivacity makes them in love with nothing but what is striking, marvellous, and dazzling. For great wits, like great beauties, look upon mere esteem as a flat insipid thing; nothing less than admiration will content them. To gain the good-will of mankind by being

being useful to them, is, in their opinion, a poor low groveling aim: their ambition is to draw the eyes of the world upon them by dazzling and surprising them; a temper which draws them off from the love of truth, and consequently subjects them to gross mistakes. For they will not love truth as such; they will love it only, when it happens to be surprising and uncommon, which few important truths are: the love of novelty will be the predominant passion; that of truth will only influence them, when it does not interfere with it. Perhaps nothing sooner misleads men out of the road of truth, than to have the wild dancing light of a bright imagination playing before them. Perhaps they have too much life and spirit to have patience enough to go to the bottom of a subject, and trace up every argument, through a long tedious process, to its original. Perhaps they have that delicacy of make, which fits them for a swift and speedy race; but does not enable them to carry a great weight, or to go through any long journey. Whereas men of fewer ideas, who lay them in order, compare, and examine them, and go on, step by step, in a gradual chain of thinking, make up by industry and caution, what they want in quickness of apprehension. Be not discouraged, if you do not meet with success at first. Observe (for it lies within the compass of any man's observation), that he who has been long habituated to one kind of knowledge, is utterly at a loss in another to which he is unaccustomed; till, by repeated efforts, he finds a progressive opening of his faculties: and then he wonders, how he could be so long in finding out a connection of ideas, which, to a practised understanding, is very obvious. But by neglecting to use your faculties, you will in time lose the very power of using them: according to that of our blessed Saviour, *from him that hath not any additional improvement, shall be taken away even that which he hath*, the original talent intrusted to him.

Others there are, who plead an exemption from study, because their fortune makes them independent of the world, and they need not be beholden to it for a maintenance. That is, because their situation in life exempts them from the necessity of spending their time in servile

offices and hardships; therefore they may dispose of it just as they please: it is to imagine, because God has impowered them to single out the best means of employing their hours, viz. in reading, meditation, in the highest instances of piety and charity; therefore they may throw them away in a round of impertinency, vanity, and folly. The apostle's rule, that *if any man will not work, neither should he eat*, extends to the rich, as well as poor; only supposing, that there are different kinds of work assigned to each. The reason is the same in both cases, viz. That he who will do no good, ought not to receive or enjoy any. As we all are joint traders and partners in life, he forfeits his right to any share in the common stock of happiness, who does not endeavour to contribute his quota or allotted part to it; the public happiness being nothing, but the sum total of each individual's contribution to it. An easy fortune does not set men free from labour and industry in general; it only exempts them from some particular kinds of labour. It is not a blessing, as it gives them liberty to do nothing at all; but as it gives them liberty wisely to choose, and steadily to prosecute, the most ennobling exercises, and the most improving employments, the pursuit of truth, the practice of virtue, the service of that God, *who giveth them all things richly to enjoy*; in short, the doing and being every thing that is commendable, though nothing merely in order to be commended. That time, which others must employ in tilling the ground (which often deceives their expectation) with the sweat of their brow, they may lay out in cultivating the mind, a soil always grateful to the care of the tiller. The sum of what I would say is this: That, though you are not confined to any particular calling, yet you have a general one: which is to watch over your heart, and to improve your head; to make yourself master of all those accomplishments, viz. an enlarged compass of thought, that flowing humanity, and generosity, which are necessary to become a great fortune; and of all those perfections, viz. moderation, humility, and temperance, which are necessary to bear a small one patiently; but especially it is your duty to acquire a taste for those pleasures, which, after they are tasted, go off agreeably, and

and leave behind them a grateful and delightful flavour on the mind.

Happy that man, who, unembarrassed by vulgar cares, master of himself, his time and fortune, spends his time in making himself wiser; and his fortune in making others (and therefore himself) happier: who, as the will and understanding are the two ennobling faculties of the soul, thinks himself not complete, till his understanding be beautified with the valuable furniture of knowledge, as well as his will enriched with every virtue: who has furnished himself with all the advantages to relish solitude, and enliven conversation; when serious, not fullen; and when cheerful, not indiscreetly gay; his ambition not to be admired for a false glare of greatness; but to be beloved for the gentle and sober lustre of his wisdom and goodness. The greatest minister of state has not more business to do in a public capacity, than he, and indeed every man else, may find in the retired and still scenes of life. Even in his private walks, every thing that is visible convinceth him, there is present a Being invisible. Aided by natural philosophy, he reads plain legible traces of the Divinity in every thing he meets: he sees the Deity in every tree, as well as Moses did in the burning bush, though not in so glaring a manner: and when he sees him, he adores him with the tribute of a grateful heart.

III. I shall now, as I proposed, draw towards a conclusion, by subjoining some reflections which have a connection with the subject.

First, Let us set a just value upon, and make a due use of those advantages, which we of this place enjoy, who are here separated from the busy world, *to seek and intermeddle with wisdom.*

One considerable advantage is, that regular method of study, too much neglected in other places, which obtains here. Nothing is more common elsewhere, than for persons to plunge at once into the very depth of science, far beyond their own, without having learned the first rudiments: nothing more common than for some to pass themselves upon the world for great scholars, by the help of universal dictionaries, abridgments, and indexes: by which means they gain an useless smattering in every branch of literature, just enough to enable them to talk

fluently, or rather impertinently, upon most subjects; but not to think justly and deeply upon any; like those who have a general superficial acquaintance with almost every body: to cultivate an intimate and entire friendship with one or two worthy persons, would be of more service to them. The true genuine way to make a substantial scholar, is what takes place here, viz. to begin with those general principles of reasoning upon which all science depends, and which give a light to every part of literature; to make gradual advances a slow, but sure process; to travel gently, with proper guides to direct us, through the most beautiful and fruitful regions of knowledge in general; before we fix ourselves in, and confine ourselves to, any particular province of it: it being the great secret of education, not to make a man a complete master of any branch of science, but to give his mind that freedom, openness, and extent, which shall empower him to master it, or indeed any other, whenever he shall turn the bent of his studies that way: which is best done, by setting before him, in his earlier years, a GENERAL view of the whole intellectual world: whereas an early and entire attachment to one particular calling, narrows the abilities of the mind to that degree, that he can scarce think out of that track to which he is accustomed.

The next advantage I shall mention is, a direction in the choice of authors, upon the most material subjects. For it is perhaps a great truth, that learning might be reduced to a much narrower compass, if one were to read none but original authors; meaning by original authors, those who write chiefly from their own fund of sense, without treading servilely in the steps of others.

Here, too, a generous emulation quickens our endeavours, and the friend improves the scholar: the tediousness of the way to truth is insensibly beguiled by having fellow-travellers, who keep an even pace with us: each light dispenses a brighter flame, by mixing its social rays with those of others. Here we live sequestered from noise and hurry, far from the great scene of business, vanity, and idleness, our hours all our own. Here it is, as in the Athenian torch-race, where a series of men have successively transmitted from one to another the torch of knowledge; and no sooner has one quit-
ted

ted it, but another equally able takes the lamp to dispense light to all within his sphere. But the greatest commendation of these seminaries is, that they have been constantly blackened by the enemies of religion and goodness. Those who have planted their batteries against the Christian religion, have always singled out the universities as the mark of their hostilities: which is virtually to confess, that they are the bulwarks of religion, and that they can never succeed in their audacious attempts, till they have brought them into discredit.

Others there may be, who censure them without just grounds. For it is a fault, to which men are very subject, to dislike what is confessedly good; because their crude conceptions, never reduced to practice, may suggest something in their opinion better. But, in fact, where is there a better method of education to be found? It is easy to form fine Utopian theories; it is easy to govern and manage our own ideas, the world within: for nothing is more pliant and obsequious, than our own ideas: but to govern the world without, far more stubborn and uncomplying than our ideas, and new-model it to our schemes, this is the great difficulty. If they were to proceed from theory to fact, they would find several difficulties start up, which they were not aware of; and that things upon experiment never fully answer the flattering notions which they may entertain in their imaginations.

Dismissing, therefore, these visionaries, let me proceed to tell you, that our hopes are placed upon you; that, whatever clamours may have been raised against you by men, who weakly or wickedly confound the innocent with the guilty, by a judgment directly contrary to THAT of the last day (for that severs the one from the other); yet we look upon you for so considerable a part, as the most uncorrupt part of the nation, in principles at least; and, I think, in morals too. And may you long continue so! for the universities have been justly called *the eyes of the nation*; and if *the eyes of the nation be evil, the whole body of it must be full of darkness*, ignorance, and vice.

May none of us, therefore, zdly, complain, that the discipline of the place is too strict; when all the world besides are complaining of the remissness of it. May we rather reflect, that there needs nothing

else to make a man completely miserable, but to let him, in the most dangerous stage of life, carve out an happiness for himself, without any check upon the sallies of youth. Those to whom you have been over-indulgent, and perhaps could not have been otherwise, without proceeding to extremities, never to be used but in desperate cases; those have been always the most liberal of their censures and invectives against you; they put one in mind of Adonijah's rebellion against David his father: because *his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?* It is a certain sign, men want restraints, when they are impatient under any; too headstrong to be governed by authority, too weak to be conducted by reason.

It were to be wished, that they who claim greater indulgences, would seriously reflect, that the glaring irregularities of two or three members bring an undistinguishing censure upon a whole body, make a noise in, and alarm the world, as if all flesh here had corrupted their ways: whereas the sober modest worth of a much greater number, who here in private attend the duties of the wise and good, must, in the nature of the thing, escape the notice of the world. Notorious disorders, how few soever are concerned, strike upon the senses of some, and affect the passions of many more; by which (their senses and passions) the gross of mankind generally judge of things: but it requires some expence of reflection, to which the bulk of mankind will never put themselves, to consider, that great numbers must have spent their time profitably, formed habits of just thinking here, and laid in that stock of knowledge which they have produced into view, in a more public sphere: that those vices which they complain of may not be the native growth of the place; but imported from irregular and undisciplined families, from schools, and from the worst of schools, the world at large, when youth are entered into it too soon.

Lastly, consider, that it is a sure indication of good sense to be diffident of it. We then, and not till then, are growing wise, when we begin to discern how weak and unwise we are. An absolute perfection of understanding is impossible: he makes the nearest approaches to it, who has the sense to discern, and the humility

mility to acknowledge its imperfections. Modesty always fits gracefully upon youth: it covers a multitude of faults, and doubles the lustre of every virtue which it seems to hide: the perfections of men being like those flowers which appear more beautiful when their leaves are a little contracted and folded up, than when they are full-blown, and display themselves, without any reserve, to the view.

We are, some of us, very fond of knowledge, and apt to value ourselves upon any proficiency in the sciences: one science, however, there is worth more than all the rest, and that is the science of living well: which shall remain, when, *whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.* As to new notions, and new doctrines, of which this age is very fruitful, the time will come, when *we shall have no pleasure in them*; nay, the time shall come when they shall be exploded, and would have been forgotten, if they had not been preserved in those excellent books, which contain a confutation of them; like insects preserved for ages in amber, which otherwise would soon have returned to the common mass of things. But a firm belief of Christianity, and a practice suitable to it, will support and invigorate the mind to the last, and most of all at last, at that important hour, which must decide our hopes and apprehensions: and the wisdom which, like our Saviour, cometh from above, will through his merits bring us thither. And indeed all our other studies and pursuits, however different, ought to be subservient to, and centre in this grand point, the pursuit of eternal happiness, by being good in ourselves, and useful to the world. Soon, very soon, the disputer of this world may be no more: Of this world, says St. Paul: for disputes will have no place in another. But the meek and humble Christian, who chiefly desired to understand that he might direct his will, and to know that he might act rightly, is a character which will stand us in stead for ever—when pride and self-confidence shall be no more. For we shall no more know in part.

SERMON V.

On the Government of the Thoughts.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, 1734.]

PROVERBS, iv. 23.

Keep thy heart with all diligence: for out of it are the issues of life.

THE meaning of which words is, Keep a strict guard over the workings of your mind, your thoughts, and inclinations, of which the heart is commonly supposed to be the seat: for your life and conversation will be conformable to the main current of your thoughts and desires.

All sin confessedly consisting in the will, he that wills the commission of a wicked action, is as guilty before God, who seeth in secret, as if he had actually committed the fact. For what should hinder the man who deliberately indulges sinful thoughts, from reducing them to practice? It is not the fear of God: for then he would not have given an uncontrolled loose to his thoughts, awed by that Being, who is of too discerning eyes not to behold the impurity of his heart, and of too pure eyes to behold it with pleasure.

No: it was another principle that restrained him, a fear of what the world would say. A conduct highly affrontive this! to be fool-hardy towards God, and a coward towards man; to brave the almighty displeasure of his Maker, and yet dread the impotent censures of the world.

The soul is ever busy and at work: there is no pause, no suspension, of thought, at least while we are awake. Think we must—But what to think upon—what track to pursue, instead of giving ourselves an unconfined range, in that wide and spacious field of thinking, which opens itself to us on every hand—this ought to be our study, and shall be my present inquiry.

Suffer me, then,

I. To inquire how far we have or may have a command over our thoughts, and consequently how far we are accountable for them.

II. To lay down some directions for the government of our thoughts.

I. I am to inquire how far we have or may have a command over our thoughts, and

and consequently how far we are accountable for them.

First, It is impossible to hinder irregular fantastic, evil thoughts from rising up in our minds. Ill thoughts, like ill company, will be sometimes obtruding and forcing themselves upon us: but then we may choose whether we will cultivate a familiarity and intimate acquaintance with them: we may do as we please, whether we will give them a friendly entertainment, or, on the other hand, dismiss these audacious and impertinent intruders, with this significant rebuke: "Away from me, ye wicked thoughts, I will keep the commandments of God."

Secondly, It is not in our power to prevent distractions, interruption, and avocation of thought, even in our religious addresses to God. While the soul is immersed in matter, it will be sometimes too languid to raise its thoughts, or too volatile to fix them steadily upon God. This is our frailty, our misfortune, but will not be imputed to us as a sin, provided we strive against it: and when we have done all we can, we have done all we ought. For this reason, as soon as we enter the sanctuary, we should beg the assistance of God's Spirit, that our thoughts may be fixed; that we may be collected in ourselves, and serve God with that undivided attention which is due from a creature to his Creator; as knowing, that it is ridiculous to expect God will hear us, when we really do not hear ourselves; which is the case when our lips move as it were mechanically, but our minds are absent and inattentive. It was with this view, * that, in the ancient Greek liturgies, the deacon was ordered to cry aloud, *ἐκτενῶς δευόμεν*, *Let us pray fervently*; and again, some time after, *ἐκτενέστερον*, *Let us pray more fervently*. And it would be well, if we would make this use of that exhortatory admonition, which occurs so often in our liturgy, *viz.* "Let us pray:" and which was inserted with this design, among others, to rally our undisciplined thoughts, to recall our straggling ideas, and to put us in mind that we ought to be praying with an affectionate application.

Thirdly, Our thoughts are not absolutely free, just after we have received some considerable loss or disaster. All that we can do, is to take care, that we do not give up our mind a prey to melan-

choly, and wilfully indulge our sorrows; which is the case of many, even under imaginary grievances.

They will supinely sit in a pensive posture, with folded arms, brooding over their woes, till they imagine themselves upon the confines of another world; or, if they be of a religious turn, they shall fancy, that *the arrows of the Almighty are within them, the poison whereof drinketh up their spirits*. Their reason shall be either entirely suspended, or only employed to dwell upon, and heighten those darksome ideas, the imagery of a melancholic fancy, which present themselves to view. Thus their mind shall resemble a room hung about with black; their understanding being like a feeble glimmering taper, that serveth only to shew the dismal scene, and to render the horrors visible.

Some of these, during the time that their rational faculties are darkened with the fumes of melancholy, shall be haunted with blasphemous thoughts, which they complain they cannot get rid of: never considering, that our thoughts are no farther ours, than as we choose them; that all sin lies in the will, and all will implies choice: that those thoughts, therefore, which are not our choice, which we reject with a settled aversion and abhorrence, will never be placed to our account. Men, under this depression and despondency, should, with a manly determinate resolution, rouse themselves from their lethargy, and apply themselves with vigour to some employment, which may fill the capacity of their minds; or they must have recourse to company, innocent diversions, or exercise, which may lull their unquiet thoughts asleep, and put their animal spirits into pleasing and agreeable motions.

In the fourth place, angry thoughts fall under our consideration. And here, there are three things to be considered: 1st, the passion of anger; 2dly, the first starts, and fallies of this passion; and lastly, the deliberate and settled consent of the will to them. It is impossible entirely to root out the passion of anger, it being interwoven in our nature; nor is it always in our power to prevent the first fallies and starts of it—those primary motions of the mind; though we may go a great way towards it, by keeping a constant guard over ourselves, and by inuring the mind to an habitual state of recollection. But still we are invested with a

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power

* See Bisse's Beauty of Holiness.

power to with-hold the determinate consent of the will to these primary motions: we may lay the axe to the root of the tree, and quell them at their first insurrection; we may use the like expedient as Cæsar did, which was to repeat the letters of the Greek alphabet to himself, as soon as passion began to ferment: or we may counterbalance one passion by another, and may turn their artillery upon themselves. We may call in our fear to subdue our anger.

So far then as our thoughts are involuntary, so far they are not sinful. After all our endeavours to dress the little garden of the mind, ill thoughts, like weeds, will spring up; they are the native produce of the soil: but if we take care to root them up as fast as possible, as well as to cultivate and cherish each generous and beautiful plant; this is all that God requires of us.

The mind is passive in receiving its notices of things, whether pure or impure; but it is active in its determination, whether to harbour or discard them. As far as it is passive, it is entirely innocent; as far as it is active, it is accountable: and it certainly is active, when we dwell upon impure thoughts with complacency; when we strengthen ourselves in wickedness, by cherishing the remembrance of past guilty joys, and laying scenes in our imagination, for the entertainment of future pleasures. The soul takes in ideas of all kinds, like the net in scripture that gathered of every kind: but then the judgment is active in sorting them; in *putting the good*, as it were, *into vessels*, and *casting the bad away*. Here the mind can exercise its invisible empire; it can, in most cases, say to one idea, *Go, and it goeth*; and to another, *Come, and it cometh*: as well as to the organs of the body, *Do this*, and he doth it. For instance, out of that variety of objects which present themselves, it can single out for a more particular and distinct view the following ones, viz. eternal happiness or misery; that all-knowing Being, who is the witness of our actions here, who will be the judge of them at the last day, and the rewarder or punisher of them to all eternity. We can inure ourselves to such considerations (every evening as we lie down, and every morning as we rise up) till our spirits almost mechanically run in the same beaten track: till our thoughts almost as naturally flow in the same pure unfulled

current to which they have been habituated, as a river does in the channel to which it has been long accustomed. They must know little of human nature, and the workings of their own minds, who do not observe that the train of their thoughts and motions of their souls depend almost as much upon custom as the motions of their bodies do.

If a man fixes his thoughts, for example, upon money, and turns in his head all the ways and means of having his portion in this life, his soul, his groveling soul, will cleave to the dust. If he fixes his thoughts deliberately and seriously (morning and evening) upon the immortal welfare of his soul, it will steadfastly cleave unto God.

Only take this along with you, that good thoughts must not just pass thro' the mind like a *guest that tarrieth but an hour*: no, they must dwell there, till our hearts be pierced with a feeling sense of them, as well as our heads convinced of the truth and importance of them. Good thoughts will not court our acquaintance, and make the first advances to us: but if we often read and meditate on religious subjects; if we, at stated hours, invite them to come and make their abode with us, they will at last come of themselves, without waiting for the formality of a set invitation. Religion deeply imbibed, like profound knowledge, must be the offspring of silence, unbroken meditations, and oft-repeated thoughts. Thus, and thus only, God will reign in the little world within us, as he does in the great world, supreme, *over all blessed for evermore*, and evermore blessing us: our hearts will be a little heaven, where the Deity rules enthroned and uppermost, with an unrivalled influence; each passion, like *wind and storm, fulfilling his word*.

But farther, the soul has a power lodged in itself to with-hold its approbation, when a sensible object is presented; till it has examined, whether all things considered, upon the balance of the account, it be for its good in the whole, or no. We can as well suspend our judgment, till we have got moral evidence that such an apparent good will really conduce to our happiness, as we can stand still, when we are not assured, that such a path leads to our journey's end: "Our mature examination is the consulting of a guide; the determination

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"of the will thereupon, is the following
"of that guide *." Here then we see,
in what the government of our thoughts
consists: they are not criminal, till they
have the consent of the will; and the
soul can with-hold that consent, till it
has sufficiently considered the whole
case: otherwise we should have no more
remorse for willing and acting upon a
rash and precipitate judgment, than we
should condemn a stone for falling, or
fire for burning: for we could never
have any compunction of conscience for
that which we were sensible we could not
help. The will, then, cannot be irresist-
ibly enslaved by any finite gratification,
because it may still think of a greater;
and allowing that its just weight, give it
the ascendant over the lesser. We may
habituate ourselves to the contemplation
of the greatest good, and then lesser de-
lights will shine with a diminished lustre,
or rather *have no glory*, by reason of the
glory that excelleth.

Our ideas are of no manner of service,
when they lie, as it were, in heaps in our
mind, huddled and confused: we must
draw them out and unfold them, before
we can put them to use. Thus, for
instance, the consideration, that there is
a God, is a great restraint from sin:
but it is not this thought in the gross
only: the idea must be opened and un-
ravelled, and what is contained in it laid
distinctly and in order before us, to make
it an effectual preservative against vice:
as that he who made and upholds every
being, must be intimately present to every
thing; that a Being infinitely holy must
detest vice; a Being infinitely just must
punish it; that when we do ill, we for-
feit his favour, who can overcast the soul
with a gloom of horror and the very
blackness of darkness, or brighten it up
with the fulness of bliss and glory:—that
of him we and all things are, as our
Creator; through him we and all things
continue, as our Preserver; and to him
all that we are, is to be ascribed; and
all that we can do, is but our bounden
duty.

If it be possible for a man to sin with
such clear, open, and explicit notices of
God, appearing, without any reserve, in
their full strength to his mind, it will be
impossible for him to repent: for repent-

ance is owing to the recollection of such
thoughts as these, to the rallying those
forces of the mind, which were put into
such disorder and confusion, that they
could do no service, by the onset of some
passion.

I have here anticipated some things,
which fall more properly under my second
head; because, in shewing what power
we have over our thoughts, it was neces-
sary to consider what power we had, if
we observed certain rules.

II. I proceed now more particularly
to lay down some rules for the conduct of
our thoughts.

In the first place, we must not give too
much into light amusements. Vagrant,
disorderly, ungoverned thoughts, are as
naturally the result of a playing, visiting,
wandering life, as a commanding reason
and well-disciplined thoughts are the result
of watchfulness, frequent meditation, and
recollection. It is an evident and acknow-
ledged truth, that sensuality is destructive
of true piety: but I believe, that a con-
tinued succession of diversions, and an
impertinent course of life, will as effec-
tually take off all religious impressions, as
even sensuality itself: because the mind is
so narrowed by confining itself to a poor
set of low, little, childish notions, that it
cannot, in process of time, open wide
enough to admit of such grand and au-
gust objects, as those of God and a blessed
immortality.

The mind, by being fixed on trifles,
is disabled and indisposed for greater and
more important business: hence a soul
giddy with silly joys, or burdened with
imaginary cares. It is the same thing,
whether the good seed is sunk in mud, in
gluttony, and intemperance; or it is burnt
up by the heat of the sun, by the bright-
ness and gaiety of what we call a genteel
life.

What a shocking thing is it to see
creatures, who have families to take care
of, or, at least, their own souls to save,
doing little or nothing but *eating and drink-
ing, and then rising up to play*; while their
minds are agitated alternately by the
hopes of winning, or the fear of losing!
Each liberal sentiment and every other
passion is suspended, to give way to the
exercise of the most illiberal and sordid of
all the passions, the desire of gain. This
diversion is, one would think, the device
of those who cannot shine in conversation,

* Locke's works, vol. 1. page 112.

to put themselves upon a level with those that can. In lieu, therefore, of conversation, they have substituted this amusement, than which nothing, except their own conversation, can be more insipid. And if this were the design of those who have as little to say, as they have to do, they have effectually compassed their ends; there being no room for useful reflection, no place for good sense to instruct, or wit to entertain, the company; all distinction between poverty of thought and a rich fund of knowledge, where this has no opportunity to display, nor that to expose itself, being lost and confounded: and when they retire home, they have this comfortable reflection to make, that a soul capable of enlarging its stock of ideas, and improving its love of virtue, has, for a considerable time, been conversant with no ideas, but those which were exactly suited to the capacity and taste of a child. The mind is enlarged or contracted, just as the objects upon which it chooses to dwell, and is most familiar with, are great or little.

Diversions, however innocent in themselves, may be very injurious in their consequences; because they destroy a greatness and manliness of soul, and occasion that unsettled levity of temper, which exposes us to the inroad of temptations, and makes us susceptible of bad impressions. A determinate steadiness of mind being once lost, which is the anchor of the soul, she becomes the sport of passions, and is carried away with every wind.

Secondly, We must avoid the reading of bad books. For it is certain, that as good books adorn the mind with the treasures of good sense and beneficial knowledge, ill ones must store it with a fund of impure and immodest ideas. Thus many plays, instead of ennobling the soul with generous sentiments, fully the imagination, by describing lust with all its incentives and allurements, and awaken those passions which lay dormant before. If we say we read them for their wit, and not for their impurity, it may be true; but then it ought to be considered, that the poison of vice never goes more glibly down than when wit is made the vehicle to convey it. It is granted, that good writers make the deeper impression, when they make their court to the fancy by bribing it with agreeable metaphors, paintings, and lively imagery: because

the soul being obliged to use the ministry of the senses, if we would gain an access to, and procure an audience from, the soul their sovereign, we must first address ourselves to the senses, as we do to other ministers. Must not, therefore, impure ideas, as well as virtuous ones, find an easier admittance to the mind, and meet with a more favourable reception, when they come recommended by the agreeable dress of wit; especially if we consider the inbred corruptions of the heart, and that they have a strong party within. Spritely fallies of the imagination, the heightenings of poetry, and artful turns of thought, dazzle the mind, and hinder it from considering the deformity of the vice which they insinuate. The more beautiful any genius is, the more injury it does, when it is prostituted to lewdness. But these writings are more especially baneful to young, raw, and unfurnished minds; like poison, which always operates the most powerfully upon an empty stomach. And perhaps the difficulties which some people are obliged to conflict with upon the account of their virtue, would not have been so great, if it had not been, in some measure, blasted in the bud by some of those loose authors, with whom this nation abounds more than perhaps any other.

I would not be thought to pass a general undistinguishing censure upon all plays: some of them are rational and manly entertainments, and may be read with improvement, as well as delight. As for the rest, I would offer it to the consideration of virtuous persons, whether it be consistent with their character, as such, to read in the closet, or hear on the stage, such lewd and immodest sentiments, as it would not be consistent with modesty to hear or utter in private conversation? Whether most plays are not full of such gross ideas and impure speeches, as a modest person would think himself obliged to resent, if addressed to him in company? Add to this, that those who lay themselves out in perusing books addressed wholly to the imagination, will look upon every other composition as dry, jejune, and tasteless: just as those who are accustomed to high-seasoned delicacies, which inflame the blood, have a distaste for plain and simple food, however nourishing and wholesome.

Thirdly,

Thirdly. Call in other ideas to your aid, as soon as ever any passion begins to ferment: for you break the force of any one idea, however strong and importunate, by summoning in others. One violent passion does, for a time, ingross the whole brute, because brutes have not a command over their past perceptions, so as to assemble them when they please: and hence their rage, or their grief, or their lust, is genuine and unmixed, without any check or restraint upon it from a power of reflecting upon something else. And if one passion ingrosses the whole man, he so far degenerates into a brute: for, from this power over our ideas, which brutes have not, we are styled reasonable creatures; and, by the exercise of this power, we become in fact so. We must then immediately, upon any temptation, strive to turn our thoughts into another channel. I have already mentioned the example of an Heathen: here I shall recommend that of a Christian emperor, who constantly, upon such occasions, said to himself the Lord's prayer, lest he should be overset by any sudden gust of passion before he had time to call in the succours of mighty reason, and almighty grace. Or, as novelty may have sometimes a greater effect, than what is familiar to us, we may, for variety, substitute in the room of it, this or any other prayer, which, by reason of its shortness, may easily be remembered: "O God, may thy mercy pardon what I have been! may thy grace reform what I am! and may thy wisdom direct what I shall be!"

When we observe in ourselves the least approaches towards anger, lust, envy, and discontent; we are not to put off our application to God for his grace, to some prefixed distance of time: no, we should forthwith desire his assistance, and pray for the succours of his Holy Spirit. For by immediately recollecting ourselves, and desiring his assistance upon the first solicitation of any vice; which we may do silently in public as well as in private, in a crowd as well as in our closet; we stop the progress of evil, by introducing another train of thinking: whereas, by delaying our addresses till the stated periods of prayer return, we let the poison work in us, without applying the proper antidote in time. No doubt, morning and

evening prayers are indispensable duties; and some part of our time ought every day to be dedicated to God, as an acknowledgment that the whole of our time is his gift. But we ought to take care, that our formal petitions do not supersede our habitual and constant endeavours. And if we would know the reason why some who are constant to their devotions, yet are as envious, censorious, fretful, and impatient as others; it is, because they use religion merely as an occasional, formal, set thing; but never habitually apply it to the common occurrences of life. They put it on like some particular dress, at set times, and on some occasions; and then lay it aside again for the rest of the week. On the other hand, if, upon the first motions towards anger, impatience, uncharitableness, &c. they without delay, upon the spot, prayed to God, and invoked his aid; this would be, upon every incident, an expedient to expel bad thoughts, before they had gotten full possession of the heart, by bringing others more worthy into their room. We must feel, if we are attentive, the disorders of the mind, as well as the distempers of the body. We must know, when any glance of ill-nature, lust, or discontent, comes across our minds; and to turn our thoughts to God, upon that emergent occasion, by a mental prayer, is instantly to withdraw the mind from evil, to retract the bad design, before it has made any advances in our hearts, and to endeavour after the opposite virtue. Whatever methods we take to govern our unruly thoughts, we must employ them, when they first take up arms. We must before passion makes head, and becomes formidable, recollect such thoughts as these: "How often have my second cooler thoughts disproved, what my first apprehension of things, upon a sudden provocation, have suggested? When storms arise in my breast, I will wait for the second surer report, which my judgment shall bring in, for the still small voice of reason."

Fourthly, We must often descend into ourselves. Some are, in a bad sense, most busy, when and where they have nothing to do: we too, in another sense, must be most busy, when, in the language of the world, we have nothing to do;

but, in the language of reason and Christianity, have our eternal salvation to *work out with fear and trembling*. We must ask our hearts the following questions: "Tell me truly, O my conscience, am I really better than other men? or am I a more artful hypocrite? Am I not like an actor, who may choose perhaps to sustain the character of a saint or some worthy man on the theatre, before the eyes of the public; but, when withdrawn behind the scenes, is upon a level with those who acted the parts of a villain, or an abandoned debauchee? Am I intrinsically good, good through a principle of obeying and pleasing my Maker? or do I only study to save appearances with regard to the world? Instead of wasting my time in those follies which fill the circle of an useless life, do I grow wiser, humbler, and meeker, as I increase in years? or is the heat and passion of youth only succeeded by the peevishness of a more advanced age; like wine fermenting when it is new, and growing sour and eager when it is drawn to the dregs?"

Without such questions often asked, and seriously answered, without sounding the depth of our hearts, our lives will be one universal void, one undistinguished blank, without any act of substantial, well-grounded, inward piety, to fill the space between the cradle and the grave. They will be, what they are often compared to, a dream indeed, where caprice and fancy govern, but reason lies asleep. We are often inquiring into other people's concerns; we are indolent to know, and glad to communicate, how much such a man has, how much he expends, and whether his expences suit his income: but, alas! it would be much better for us to turn our thought inwards, and to view the workings of the soul. Are we reluctant and unwilling to do it? then we may take it for granted, there is something amiss within: for that life can no more be found at the bottom, than that religion, which dreads the test of a fair examination. Fain would I persuade those, with whom novelty has so great charms, that they spend their time in little or nothing, but hearing, seeing, or telling something new, to add yet one new thing more, new, I mean, to them, viz. one serious thought upon the follow-

ing question: "What would become of them, if God should require their souls this night? what, if upon that supposition they should be finally lost, and miscarry for ever? what, if upon that supposition they are going to give an account, before the greatest of beings, of a life, that they cannot reflect upon, even in private and by themselves, without the utmost shame and confusion?" We are, too many of us, at a great expence of time, health, and fortune: one expence, however, is necessary; an expence of thought, and of that we are very sparing.

But this brings me, lastly, to mention another preservative against evil thoughts, I mean the pursuit of knowledge.

For, in proportion as our love for contemplation increases, a relish for criminal pleasures will deaden and abate. The more variety of knowledge the mind is enriched with, the more channels there will be to divert our thoughts into. When once the soul, which has a restless activity, and must be at work, is provided with proper materials to work upon, when once early custom has made a rational and solid train of thinking easy to you; you will be comparatively happy, unless some uncommon disaster befall you, for the remaining term of your life. Most other pleasures, besides those of knowledge and virtue, are either idle diversions to sooth the soul into a forgetfulness of its miseries, and to make life pass away unperceived; or they are tumultuous joys, which put the soul into a ferment, and give it too violent agitations: but your pleasures will be the perfections of human nature, and yourself an ornament to it. Reading and thinking will quicken all the still scenes of life, and direct you in all the busy parts of it. Whereas if you neglect this early culture, you will fall into the most uneasy situation of mind, that of being weary of yourself, and yet be incapable of relishing any company, but what is as poor and uninteresting as your own. Your time will be a burden to you, and yourself (for such is that man who does little or no good) an useless burden to the public. Your mind, like your body, came naked into the world, and naked will it return, unenriched with knowledge, unennobled by virtue. The fierceness of your passions will, indeed, in the decline

of life, abate and die away : and it is very providential that they do decay. For a weak infirm body could not bear those violent eruptions, to which youth is subject : they would be like *new wine in old bottles* : the ferment would be too strong and impetuous for the weak inclosure ; it would burst through, and destroy them. But, though the passions contract themselves, your folly will only receive different modifications, according to the different stages of life : and what was an active vigorous impertinence in youth, will be in age a joyless dulness. It is the same shallow stream still ; only what ran before with an empty noise, will be, in the winter of your days, frozen and motionless. Of a profligate youth, an untimely death or a dis-tempered old age is the necessary consequence ; of a giddy impertinent youth, a frivolous old age, and all the childishness of our former years, without the vivacity of them ; you must have recourse to a thousand trifles to fill up the mighty void of thought, to shut out that importunate intruder, self-reflection, and to keep off that fullness, which must come upon a mind conscious of no intrinsic worth : and when some years, each succeeding one more flat and insipid than the foregoing, are thus spent, you can have no reason to wish for a longer continuance in this world, but merely because you dread what will be your condition in another. Idleness will either end in a confirmed stupidity, or it will break out into an ill-natured activity, into spleen, fretfulness, and impatience, just as it meets with a phlegmatic, or a warm complexion. The soul, when withheld from its proper sphere of action, either settles into a lifeless stagnation, or it preys upon itself, and contracts a rancorous eagerness of spirit, dissatisfied with itself, and out of humour with every thing else. Business, on the other hand, application and industry, will shut up all the avenues to temptation, fill the compass of our minds, and exclude those vicious ideas, which will be laying close siege, and pressing for admittance.

May God defend us from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul.

SERMON VI.

On the Reasonableness of Prayer in general, and of Public Worship.

ROMANS, xii. 12.

Continuing instant in prayer.

TO preserve upon our minds a sense of God, and our dependence on him, the apostle here recommends constant prayer,

To enforce which advice, I shall,

I. Shew the reasonableness and advantages of prayer in general.

II. Of public worship.

III. Of family-prayer.

IV. Conclude with an exhortation to prayer.

I. Then, I am to shew the reasonableness and advantages of prayer in general.

Certainly nothing is more reasonable, than that we, who know that *every good and perfect gift cometh from above*, should acknowledge, that it doth so, by looking up to that Being *from whom our help cometh*. Were, indeed, what we receive, a matter of strict debt, then we might say, Who is the Lord, that we should pray unto him ? but as our enjoyments are the effects of his undeserved mercy, it becomes us to ask if we would receive. In a word, they that are sensible of their dependence every moment upon God, ought to perform such acts as are expressive, in the most significant manner, of that dependence. Now, prayer is the most significant and expressive of our dependence upon him : since not to pray, would imply, that what is conveyed to us was not of free grace, but a matter of undisputed right.

Again, if prayer be beneficial to human nature, God, as a good Creator, must necessarily desire the performance of a duty which is for the good of his creatures : but that prayer is beneficial to human nature, is evident ;

Because, in the first place, it has a tendency to beget in us those very graces and virtues, which we pray for. For what we constantly and seriously pray for, that we shall earnestly desire ; and what we earnestly desire, that we shall

endeavour to attain: warm desires naturally ripen into correspondent actions.

Secondly, What can humble the soul more in prosperity, than to prostrate ourselves before him, *who is clothed with majesty and honour?* or what can brighten up the soul more in adversity, than to consider him who is the almighty *helper of the friendless?* Nothing is more deeply rivetted in human nature, than a spirit of self-sufficiency and independency: and nothing is more requisite to beat down this spirit than prayer, which is the confession of insufficiency in ourselves, and our dependence on our Maker. When we are praying, we either do, or ought to consider ourselves, as so many malefactors met to implore the mercy of our great judge: and what can lower the pride of man more, than such a consideration?

Thirdly, It is the best expedient to compose our passions. We must not pretend it is impossible to govern our passions. For what we can govern in the presence of a king, or any great man, that we may certainly do by the consideration of the presence of the King of kings. And yet it is a melancholy truth, that thousands, who act a part with great applause on the public theatre of the world, would not for a great deal, that mankind should see what they act behind the scenes, when withdrawn from the eye of the world into privacy and retirement. The misfortune is, we do not habituate ourselves to a vigorous sense of God's presence. Now, prayer supplies this defect: it sets God before us, makes us consider ourselves as acting immediately under his all-seeing eye, and possesses our minds with a lively reverence of his tremendous nature. And to consider, that a Being, whom *the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain, is about our path and about our bed, and spies out all our ways;* that he, *in whom we live, and move, and have our being,* must be nearer to the soul than any object whatever; and that therefore, in a much nobler sense than this saying was used formerly, we are never less alone, than we are thus alone, holding an intercourse, and walking with God; is a thought enough to rouse the most indolent, and fix the most unsteady.

Fourthly, Prayer is highly useful to

beget and cherish in us an universal benevolence. Whenever we have any difference with a neighbour, let us, instead of indulging little spiteful reflections, fall on our knees, and pray for him with a serious recollection of mind, begging that God would adjust his supplies to his necessities, protect him with his power, direct him by his wisdom, and crown him with mercy and loving-kindness: after such particular, earnest, and repeated applications to the throne of grace, we should find all ill-natured and cankered passions die away, and a tender sympathising temper, a flowing humanity, and a liberal open-heartedness, succeed in their room. We shall think no instance of common civility too great to be shewn to him, for whom we sincerely and constantly desired eternal happiness. And to this universal intercession for their bitterest foes and for all mankind, which was the constant practice of the primitive Christians, perhaps it was owing, that whenever the plague raged in any of the most populous cities, such as Rome, Alexandria, &c. they sent supplies to relieve the necessities, and administered medicines to cure the diseases, even of their persecutors. While their friends and relations forsook them and fled, the Christians stood their ground, and endeavoured to save the lives of their enemies at the hazard of their own. We could not be guilty of any unkind, angry, peevish behaviour to him in public, for whose spiritual and temporal welfare we daily, seriously, and affectionately put up our prayers in private: to pour forth the overflowings of a benevolent heart towards any man in prayer to God for him, and to vent the overflowings of our gall in company against him, being as incompatible as light and darkness. Those generous sentiments, to which we had habituated the mind by the stated hours of devotion, would open and enlarge the mind with the most animated and impartial good-will, would free us from all rancour to our foes, all partial attachments to our friends, and all indifference to the rest of mankind; would gain admittance for an extensive charity, where it was before a stranger, and cultivate its interests, where it was already a well-received guest. Prayers for all mankind offered up daily to him, who is the universal Parent of mankind, is benevolence,

nevolence, as well as devotion, put in practice every day.

Every vice is checked and every virtue kept alive by a fixed awakened sense of the Deity, by a due regard for, and fear of him. Now, constant attentive prayer best preserves this regard and reverence for an invisible being; just as a constant correspondence cherishes the affectionate remembrance of an absent friend, and revives those impressions, which length of time would wear out and deface. God therefore grants our petitions, not merely because we pray, but because prayer, attentive prayer, though it does not make him more willing to bestow, makes us fitter and more qualified subjects to receive the emanations of his favour. It is true, God will grant us what is fit; but then it is as true, that it is not fit he should prostitute his favours upon those, who will not pray for them with an humble sense of their dependence, and receive them with a grateful sense of his goodness. The fitness of the thing depends upon the qualifications of the person; and the qualification of the person to receive depends upon that holy humble frame of mind, from which prayer proceeds. We do not pretend that the Deity is altered by our prayers; but that the relation which we bear to the Deity is so, when from irreligious and indevout sinners we commence sincere votaries of religion. God, who *accepteth according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not*, will not reject the poor weak efforts of an indigent dependent being, willing to express, in the best manner he can, the notices he has upon his mind of the divine excellency; yet unable to perform any act of adoration, which bears the least proportion to his greatness. And he, who *dwelleth not in temples made with hands*, delighteth to dwell in a much nobler temple, that of an humble and contrite spirit.

Add to these arguments, that prayer is exemplified in our Saviour's life, inculcated in his precepts, and enforced by this strong motive, that he will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him. And it is highly reasonable to suppose, that a Being always benevolent to us, always intimately present with us, will not be wanting in the gracious assistances of his Spirit to that soul, which is not wanting

to itself in humble addresses joined with its own vigorous endeavours. And vice is perhaps nothing but the smothering and stifling the beams of divine grace; as blackness is nothing but the absorbing and suffocating the rays of light.

It would be ridiculous to deny the operations of the Holy Spirit, because we are not sensible of them, and do not know how God actuates the soul. We ought rather to reason thus: We know that we have been *holden up by God ever since we were born*; but yet have not an intimate consciousness and feeling of that influence by which he supports us, or any knowledge how he upholds our existence: just so we prove from Scripture, that he conveys his grace to us, but are strangers to the manner in which he dispenses it. We no more can have our spiritual life, than we have our natural life, independently of God's assistance; and are equally in the dark as to the conveyance of either. It is no objection to this doctrine, that, as an ingenious writer * expresses it, the powers of nature and the influences of grace are so blended within us, that we cannot easily unravel them. For no more can we, in all cases, precisely distinguish our foreign acquisitions from our original selves. We can no more exactly determine in every point what is natural to us, and what is acquired by us, than we can what is the result of our own endeavours, and what is the operation of God's Spirit. Those who disbelieve the assistances of divine grace, because they have not an inward sense of them, should consider, that an inward and distinct perception of the motions of God's Spirit, would be inconsistent with that degree of freedom, which is necessary in a state of probation. Could we trace the inward workings of the Spirit, it would lay too great a restraint upon us, and overpower the will. We should no more dare to sin, when we clearly and distinctly perceived the divine Spirit checking us with the most awakening notices in a sensible manner, than we should, if God himself were to appear to us in some visible symbol of his glory. Such a glaring evidence of the divine presence in us, as it is contrary to his common and uniform method of acting, would be too overbearing and irresistible. It was necessary therefore, that we should

* Mr. Mudge's Sermons.

walk by faith, and not by sight : by faith grounded upon rational and substantial proofs ; not by sight, not by any sensible indications of the Spirit dwelling in us, and working distinctly from us.

To return from this digression, the mind of man naturally affects independence. To check this temper, God has obliged us to ask for the assistance of his Holy Spirit ; our being obliged to ask, continually reminding us of (what we are very apt to forget) the dependence we have on him for our spiritual as well as natural abilities. What we could receive without petitioning for it, we should look upon as entirely our own acquisition, exclusively of our Maker. This seems to be the most obvious reason, why God has annexed the promises of his grace to the performance of this condition ; that prayer might be a perpetual memorial of our reliance on him, calling us to such a state of humility, that whenever we do well, we should in the words of the psalmist acknowledge : *Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord ; but unto thy name be ascribed the glory :* and whenever we do ill, we should in the words of Daniel confess : *To thee, O Lord, belongeth righteousness ; but unto us confusion of face.*

There is another argument for prayer, which must not be omitted : We ought to cultivate that duty, which is the distinguishing perfection of our nature. Now, religion (and by religion, the worship of God is chiefly intended) seems to bid the fairest for the distinguishing perfection of our nature ; brutes shewing some symptoms at least of reason in their actions, though they discover none of religion ; or, to speak more properly, brutes seem to be endowed with reason in a lower degree, as far as it is necessary to preserve themselves, or to propagate their kind : but man alone is ennobled with reason in so high a degree, as enables him to lift up his heart unto God in prayer, and his understanding in contemplation. And we should make it our chief business to excel the rest of mankind in that very perfection, viz. religion, by which mankind excel the brute creation.

Having thus shewn the reasonableness of prayer in general, I proceed,

II. To that of public worship.

First, God is to be regarded as the universal Benefactor of mankind, from

whom we all have received public blessings, and to whom therefore we owe public acknowledgments. For private praises and thanksgivings are, by no means, proper returns for public mercies.

Secondly, Every creature ought to do homage to his Creator ; he ought to pay the tribute of honour, where honour is due. Now, the honour of God is more promoted by his being worshipped publicly, than privately : because private prayer is piety confined within our breasts ; but public prayer is piety exemplified and displayed in our outward actions : it is the beauty of holiness made visible ; our light shines out before men, and in the eye of the world ; it enlarges the interests of godliness, and keeps up a face and sense of religion among mankind.

Were men only to repair to their devotion, as the disciple of quality did to his Lord and Master, secretly and by night for fear of the Jews ; religion, thus lonely and unfriended, would soon decay for want of public countenance and encouragement. For what would be the consequence, if religion sought the shades, and lived a recluse entirely immured in closets ; while irreligion audaciously appears abroad, *like the pestilence that destroyeth at noon-day* ? It requires no great depth of penetration to perceive, nor expence of argument to prove, that the want of a public national religion, or a general absenting from that national religion, must end in a general national irreverence to the Deity ; and an irreverence to the Deity, in an universal dissolution of morals, and all the overflowings of ungodliness. The service of the church, and the word of God read and expounded, must awaken those reflections, which it is the business of bad men to lay fast asleep, and let in upon the soul some unwelcome beams of light : but, when these constant calls to virtue are neglected, men will become gradually more and more estranged from all seriousness and goodness, till at last they end in a professed disregard to all fixed principles.

The fear of that Being, whose judgments no power can fence off, no skill elude, being absolutely necessary, it is the duty of every man, not only to cultivate this reverence in himself, but to promote it as far as he can in others. Now, he that would promote a sacred regard

regard to the Deity, must do it by such actions as are most significant of that regard: he must express and exemplify to others, that awful serious sense of the Deity, which is impressed upon his own mind, by a solemn and avowed acknowledgment of his power and glory in assemblies set apart for that purpose. Whoever thinks justly, must be sensible, that private religion never did in fact subsist, but where some public profession of it was regularly kept up: he must be sensible, that if public worship were once discontinued, an universal forgetfulness of that God would ensue, whom to remember is the strongest fence and preservative against vice; and that the bulk of mankind would soon degenerate into mere savages and barbarians, if there were not stated days to call them off from the common business of life, to attend to what is the most important business of all, their salvation in the next.

But I need not labour this point; since it is allowed even by those who are declared enemies to religion. They look upon religion, and public worship, as a political engine, to awe the common herd into a sense of their duty, not founded on reason, yet necessary to the good of mankind. How absurd this scheme is, may easily be shewn. For if they do not admit the existence of the Deity, they may be, without much difficulty, confuted; the existence of God being one of the most obvious truths. But if they do admit it, they must grant likewise, that an infinitely good Being must will whatever is for the good of his creatures; and consequently religion and public worship, which they own to be conducive to the good of mankind, must be his will: but what is the will of the Deity, must be founded on truth and reason. What is necessary to the public happiness, is therefore true. For though our private interest and truth may not always coincide; yet there is always a strict correspondence, harmony, and alliance, between truth and the general happiness.

Religion being once set aside, there will be nothing left to restrain the better sort, but a fear of shame and disgrace; and nothing to restrain the lower sort, but the dread of temporal punishments; which yet will be of little avail. For he who is weary of life, who wants to lay it down as a burden, may command yours,

or mine, or any body's else. And what should hinder him? The fear of the world to come? That will be out of the question, when once a sense of religion is extinct. The fear of this world, of an ignominious or a lingering death? Alas! temporal punishments derive their chief efficacy from the dread of divine vengeance. For, without that, a man may evade them, by being his own executioner. There are a thousand avenues to death; and though the vigilance of the magistrate may secure some of them, yet others will stand open to receive the determined and resolved, and place them beyond the reach of the impotent power of their fellow-creatures. To destroy religion, therefore, is to let loose the wretched and the desperate (a formidable body) upon the easy, affluent, and the happy. One would not choose to live in a world, which has no notion or belief of another. For however advantageous one's circumstances may be, we should lie at the mercy of those who despair of bettering their own, but by violence or fraud; there being nothing in this life to check that man, to whom life itself, as it is circumstanced, is an insupportable load.

We may observe, that a disregard to all authority is the distinguishing character of the age: children are undutiful to parents, servants are disobedient to their masters, and subjects to those that are set over them. And can they wonder at it, who seldom or never recognise, in the most open and conspicuous manner, the authority of that Being, in whom all authority, in the last link of the chain, terminates; and from whom it must be derived to governors, parents, and masters? An abandoned profaneness, dissoluteness, and debauchery in the lower sort of people are too often owing to that thorough contempt of principle, which reigns among those that are called the better sort; who, by neglecting the public observance of religion, have, in some measure, destroyed the public regard to it; who frequent at every other assembly, forsake only one assembly, *the assembling themselves together* in a religious manner. Indeed, a sense of decency, contracted by conversing with the well-bred part of mankind, may give a superficial polish to their manners, and an elegance of thinking may create an abhorrence of any gross,

gross, shocking, and beastly excesses. But the vulgar, who learn from their example to have no fear of God before their eyes, but are strangers to delicate ideas, will plunge at once into the lowest sink of vice: *sin* in them will appear *exceeding sinful*, in its genuine deformity, without any veil thrown over it. Things are already brought to that pass, that it is a question, whether the vices of some in the lowest class of mankind are a greater object of our hatred and detestation; or their poverty, sometimes the effect of those vices, of our pity and compassion.

It is too flagrant a truth to be concealed, and too melancholy a one to be told with pleasure, that a fashionable indifference to every thing serious and sacred has obtained, especially among those from whom one might expect better things; and from thence, as all fashions do, has descended to the meaner sort. And whoever would trace the universal depravation of morals up to its fountain-head, must, I believe, resolve it into that glaring contempt of natural and revealed religion, which has prevailed among persons of rank and figure. Inferiors are proud to form themselves upon the model of their superiors: and when those who are bound by all the ties of gratitude to that God, who *giveth them all things richly to enjoy*, to advance the interests of religion, and enlarge its empire, stamp a credit upon vice and irreligion; when those who, as they move in a higher sphere, ought to be the great luminaries of the world, cease to dispense a salutary influence; the dissolution of the moral world is as much to be expected, as the end of the natural world will be, when *the sun shall withdraw its shining, the moon be turned into blood, and the stars fall from heaven*.

In a word, public worship is the great instrument of securing a sense of God's providence and of a world to come; and a sense of God's providence and a world to come is the great basis of all social and private duties.

Hitherto I have argued the point merely upon the foot of natural reason. Before I dismiss this head, it may not be improper to shew what obligations we have to this duty, as Christians. The same reasons that oblige us to be admitted into the church by baptism, lay us

under a necessity of continuing in a constant communion with it. For, by forsaking this communion, we forfeit those privileges, to which our admission into the church gave us a title. The church is called *the body of Christ*; and a member, when cut off from the body, must lose those vital influences which were imparted to it from the head; *as not belding the head, from which all the body, by joints and bands, having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God*. Our Saviour erected a visible society, into which all Christians are to be embodied: *and he gave*, besides some extraordinary officers, *pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying the body of Christ; that we may grow up unto him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working of the measure of every part, maketh increase unto the edifying of itself in love*.

From which words we may fairly infer, that by deserting the church, the body of Christ, we cut ourselves off from all union with him, who is the Head of it; and consequently, whatever pretensions to morality we may make, from all those graces and benefits, here and hereafter, which are to be had by virtue of that union. *As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can we, except we abide in Christ*. By refusing to associate with any body of Christians, and to partake of those ordinances, by which we have a fellowship with Christ, we relapse into a state of nature, and have no covenanted title to that salvation, which is *the gift of God through the merits of Jesus Christ*. What was the sense of antiquity upon this head, a very great master of it * informs us, whose words I shall take the liberty to transcribe. "Not one example of any Christian church can be produced through the whole world, where the sacraments were not administered, the gospel preached, and the worship of God celebrated, in an open and public manner. Even in the sharpest persecutions, the Christian assemblies, though it may not be so openly as in times of peace, were constantly held

* Archbishop Potter.

"and frequented: and whoever did not choose to endure the most cruel death, rather than preserve his life by absenting himself, was thought unworthy to be called a Christian."

We find that, after our Saviour's ascension, his followers continued stedfastly in the apostles fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. We are commanded not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Had Christianity been, agreeably to the notion of a certain person*, a divine philosophy, existing in the mind, without public worship, or any thing that looked like a church, it must soon have expired of itself: the internal relation which we bear to Christ would have been forgotten, were there no public observances, expressive of it, kept up. The light would have gone out, which was to be kept so close, as not to shine out before men, by any avowed profession. But our blessed Saviour, by the settlement of a visible society, by appointing a standing ministry, and obliging his disciples to attend to their instructions, has perpetuated his religion, and founded it upon a Rock, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.

S E R M O N VII.

The Duties of Family and private Prayer, considered.

ROMANS, xii. 12.

Continuing instant in prayer.

HAVING in a former discourse proved,
I. The reasonableness of prayer in general; and,

II. Of public worship;

I now proceed,

III. To consider the duty of family-prayer.

It is the business of every man, within the compass of his abilities, to promote the honour of God; and consequently, of every head of a family to warm those that are beneath him, with a sense of religion, and to see, that nothing, as far as the sphere of his power extends, be hid from the heat thereof.

If, then, to instruct your family in religious duties, and to pray fervently with

them, as well as for them, would be of any service to promote piety; if every man ought to promote piety, as much as he can, in the station in which God has placed him: then it is the province allotted you, as the head of it, to walk, as the Scripture expresseth it, in your house with a perfect heart, and by your example to provoke them (the only way one would willingly provoke any person) to love and good works.

You may say, it is true, prayers at periodical and stated times are necessary to revive those impressions of the Deity, which would otherwise be effaced by the business or pleasures of life; it is requisite to shift the scene, and commune with the Father of Spirits, to prevent that disrelish for, and deadness of affection to, heavenly things, which a continual intercourse with sensible objects would else occasion. But why may not this be done in the closet? What occasion is there for family-prayers?

To this I answer, that this is to make a wrong estimate of things; it is to consider your family, as entirely consisting of persons, who have a competent knowledge how they ought to pray, and a hearty inclination to set about the performance of this duty, which is far from being the truth of the case; it is to consider them, as what one could wish them to be, instead of what in reality they are: it is to argue from theory to fact. It is granted, that men of a sober and dispassionate reason will reflect, that, if they live, as it were, without a God in this world, without ever praising and adoring him; they must expect to be separated from him for ever. But then it should be granted too, that the bulk of families will not be at this expence of reflection: and if you would bring them to a just sense and right apprehension of these things, you must light up devotion in their breasts by your instruction and example.

For, when they see you employing, and teaching them to employ the noblest principles of the soul, love and gratitude, upon God the noblest of beings; when they see you warmly affected with a sense of what you are doing, proportionably to the value and importance of the things you pray for; they who are thus commodiously placed under the direct influence of such a burning and shining light, will

* Algernoon Sidney.

will be disposed to catch the flame from you, and to feel their breasts, if they are susceptible of good impressions, burn within them with the same generous ardour.

Besides, the united devotions of a whole family acting in concert will be more effectual, than the solitary prayers of any single member when detached from the whole body; as they have a tendency to beget in others a correspondent piety, to propagate the flame from breast to breast, and to encourage, countenance, and give a sanction to exemplary holiness: but chiefly, because God has promised, that *where two or three are gathered together, he will be in the midst of them*. It is a beautiful and amiable sight to behold a well-regulated society, glorifying God with one heart and one mouth, cancelling their former sins by repentance, and forming settled resolutions of obedience for the future.

Add to this, that the joint devotions of a family are as necessary to derive a blessing upon a family, and to return thanks for blessings already received; as the applications of each individual are to beg of God, or to thank him for his own personal advantages.

If ever then you would have your children to be dutiful, and your servants faithful; if ever you desire your small community here should join hereafter with the great congregation of men and angels in one chorus to their Maker, be sure to cultivate the spot of ground committed to your care, teach them to look up to God in every step of their conduct, impress upon them, and keep alive in them, by repeated prayers, a manly, serious, and devout frame of mind; and set apart some portion of the sabbath to read, or hear them read, such good books, as may instruct them in the strong and decisive evidence of Christianity, the great work of their redemption, and the whole compass of their duty. From a neglect of doing this, it comes to pass, that our youth, as soon as they launch out into the world, fall an easy defenceless prey to those professors of iniquity, who go about seeking whom they may devour; that they become profelytes from the best religion the world was ever blessed with, to no religion at all; and that those who should be the flower of the nation, are too often the very dregs of it.

You think it a duty incumbent upon you, to let your charity begin at home, in furnishing your family with their bodily sustenance: and is it not much more your indispensable duty, as eternity is of infinitely greater concern, to make provision for their spiritual well-being? He is *worse than an infidel, who doth not provide for his own house* in this respect, as well as the *meat which perisheth not*, who doth not take care to make them happy in themselves, serviceable to the world, and acceptable to God.

And to compass this end, the spiritual nourishment of your family, it is not enough, though that should by no means be omitted, that you instruct them in the duty of prayer. Instructions are but virtue set before them in theory (lifeless theory), which, though a lovely form in the eye of abstract thinkers, yet is too delicate to make any strong impressions upon the gross of mankind, who must be affected by what is sensible. But your own good example is virtue realized and alive, it is not a mere abstract notion, it is something substantial, it is virtue brought down to their senses, with all its attractive charms; it is piety as it were incarnate; we behold its external glory, full of grace and loveliness.

It is not difficult to convince men of the reasonableness of prayer: all the difficulty lies in engaging them to the practice of it. And as long as a desire of imitation is confessedly a strong principle of action, one bright domestic pattern in a person of superior character and authority, shewing such a distinguished regard to the Deity, that morning and evening come not more constantly in their course, than his stated hours of calling his family to devotion, will have more effect upon all beneath him and about him, than a thousand dry instructions without it, which will operate but faintly in comparison. By the one you only point out their duty, but by the other (joining with them in prayer) you call it forth into action: you help to raise a grovelling and low-thoughted soul, which before was cleaving to the dust. By so often seeing the conspicuous lustre of your goodness, they will be led to the approving it; and from approving, to imitating it; and from imitating it, to be *not only almost, but altogether such as you are*.

IV. I shall now subjoin an earnest exhortation to prayer, particularly with an eye to that of the closet.

Degenerate souls, wedded to their vicious habits, may disclaim all commerce with Heaven, refusing to invoke him, whose infinite wisdom is ever prompt to discern, and his bounty to relieve the wants of those who *faithfully call upon him*; and neglecting to praise him, who is *great and marvellous* in his works, *just and righteous* in his ways, infinite and incomprehensible in his nature: but all here, I would persuade myself, would daily set apart some time to think on him, who gave us power to think: he was the author, and he should be the object, of our faculties.

And, to do this the better, let us take care, that every morning, as soon as we rise, we lay hold on this proper season of address, and offer up to God the first-fruits of our thoughts, yet fresh, unsullied, and serene, before a busy swarm of vain images crowd in upon the mind. When the spirits, just refreshed with sleep, are brisk and active, and rejoice, like that sun which ushers in the day, to run their course; when all nature, just awakened into being from insensibility, pays its early homage; then let us join in the universal chorus, who are the only creatures in the visible creation, capable of knowing to whom it is to be addressed.

And in the evening, when the stillness of the night invites to solemn thoughts, after we have collected our straggling ideas, and suffered not a reflection to stir, but what either looks upwards to God, or inward upon ourselves, upon the state of our minds; then let us scan over each action of the day, fervently intreat God's pardon for what we have done amiss, and the gracious assistance of his Spirit for the future: and, after having adjusted accounts between our Maker and ourselves, commit ourselves to his care for the following night.

Thus beginning and closing the day with devotion, imploring his direction, every morning as we rise, for the following day; and recommending ourselves, every night before we lie down, to his protection, *who neither slumbers nor sleeps*; the intermediate spaces will be better filled up: each line of our behaviour will terminate in God, as the centre of our actions. Our lives all of a piece will con-

stitute one regular whole, to which each part will be a necessary relation and correspondence, without any broken and disjointed schemes, independent of this grand end, the pleasing of God. And while we have this one point in view, whatever variety there may be in our actions, there will be an uniformity too, which constitutes the beauty of life, just as it does of every thing else; an uniformity without being dull and tedious, and a variety without being wild and irregular.

How would this settle the ferment of our youthful passions, and sweeten the last dregs of our advanced age! how would this make our lives yield the calmest satisfaction, as some flowers shed the most fragrant odours, just at the close of the day! And perhaps there is no better way to prevent a deadness and flatness of spirit from succeeding, when the briskness of our passions goes off, than to acquire an early taste for those spiritual delights, whose *leaf withers not*, and whose verdure remains in the winter of our days.

And when this transitory scene is shutting upon us, when the soul stands upon the threshold of another world, just ready to take its everlasting flight; then may we think with unallayed pleasure on God, when there can be little or no pleasure to think upon any thing else. And our souls may undauntedly follow to that place, whither our prayers and affections, those forerunners of the spirit, are gone before.

One of the greatest philosophers of this age being asked by a friend, who had often admired his patience under great provocations, by what means he had suppressed his anger? answered, "That he was naturally quick of resentment; but that he had by daily prayer and meditation attained to this mastery over himself. As soon as he arose in the morning, it was, throughout his life, his daily practice to retire for an hour to private prayer and meditation: this, he often told his friends, gave him spirit and vigour for the business of the day: this he therefore recommended as the best rule of life. For nothing, he knew, could support the soul in all distresses, but a confidence in the Supreme Being: nor can a rational and steady magnanimity flow from any other source, than a consciousness of the divine favour."

Of

Of Socrates, who is said to have gained an ascendant over his passions, it is reported, that his life was full of prayers and addresses to God.

And of Confucius, the Chinese philosopher, another great example of virtue, it is expressly recorded, that (contrary to a fashion now prevailing) he never did eat of any thing, but he first prostrated himself, and offered thanks to the supreme Lord of heaven.

"Leave not off praying," said a pious man: "for either praying will make thee leave off sinning, or sinning will make thee leave off praying." If we say our prayers in a cold, supine, lifeless manner now and then, I know no other effect they will have, but to enhance our condemnation: in effect we do not pray, we only say our prayers: we pay not the tribute of the heart, but an unmeaning form of homage; we draw near to God with our lips, while our heart is far from him. And without the perseverance in prayer, the notions of the amendment of our lives, and a sacred regard to the Deity, will only float for a while in the head, without sinking deep, or dwelling long upon the heart. We must be inured to a constant intercourse with God, to have our minds engaged and interested, and to be rooted and grounded in the love of him. But, if we invigorate our petitions, which are otherwise a lifeless carcase, with a serious and attentive spirit; composed, but not dull; affectionate, but not passionate in our addresses to God: praying, in this sense, will at last make us leave off sinning; and victory, decisive victory, declare itself in favour of virtue. Praying as a thing merely of course, without a due preparation of mind, will have no influence. But praying with a sense of what we are about, must put us upon endeavouring to be what we pray to be. For can a man pray to God to forgive his sins, and enable him to get the better of them, who is resolved all the while to continue in them? Not certainly, if he bestowed the least transient glance of thought upon what he was doing. A prayer against sin must call up uneasy reflections in his mind, who goes on in a course of sinning; and he must either break off those sins by repentance, which make prayer irksome to him, or bid adieu to those prayers, which suggest distaste-

ful considerations: piety and vice cannot very long alternately share a divided empire in our breasts: we cannot keep both to prayer, prayer offered with life and energy, and to our lusts: *Either we will hate the one, and love the other; or else we will hold to the one, and despise the other.* Let us, however, remember, that the efficacy of prayer does not depend so much on the outward act, as that inward frame and disposition of mind, with which we pray.

It would be of admirable service to us, when we are praying, to have this expression frequently in our minds: "Am I doing so important a business in so slight and perfunctory a manner; the most important business of all, with supineness and indolence?"

After all, there may be some little singularities cleaving to men of distinguished piety, which those who sit in the seat of the scornful, seldom fail to make the standing mark of their raillery. But the question is, whether, when we come to die, we would choose to be of the number of those who have been most charitable and devout, though over scrupulous, and to have our lot among the saints; or of those who have lived in an open flagrant neglect of the Deity, as if he, the Father of beings, were the only Being with whom they were resolved to have nothing to do? A thousand little weaknesses in acting or thinking will easily be forgiven in those who have meant well, and have to the best of their power acted up to that honest meaning; a sense of their infirmities begetting in them a due humility, and humility covering a multitude of pitiable infirmities. But faults committed with an high hand, and from an haughty heart, faults proceeding from a disdainful irreverence and a stubborn disobedience to the fountain of all good, and therefore the object of all duty, who has the justest claim to every instance of our obedience, are much more unpardonable, than all the little frailties incident to human nature, if they met together in one subject. The laughter of fools may soon be no more: and then we shall be sensible (why are we not so now!) that it is infinitely better to be for a while ridiculous for our infirmities, than to be odious, perhaps even here, for our vices, and miserable to all eternity.

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Dost thou labour under a load of guilt? *Come unto Christ all that travel, and ARE HEAVY laden, and he will give you rest.* Dost thou feel the pressure of affliction, or the blast of censure? Instead of loathing thy being, instead of breaking out into sudden bursts of passion against thy foes, or contracting a settled gloom of malice; unbosom thy secrets, and disburden thy cares to him, who is both able and willing to resettle thy discomposed mind. All that invenomed rancour, which is apt to imbitter our spirits against mankind in general, and our enemies in particular, when we suffer, or think we suffer undeservedly, will abate and die away, as we strive to *set our affections on things above.* Our thoughts, like the waters of the sea, when exhaled towards heaven, will lose their offensive bitterness and saltiness, leave behind them each distasteful quality, and sweeten into an amiable humanity and candour, till they descend in gentle showers of love and kindness upon our fellow-creatures.

As we invoke *the Father of lights* to rescue us from every material error, *the Father of mercies* to pardon our sins, and *the God of all comforts* to relieve our distresses; we shall be assured, that *all things*, sooner or later, *will work together for good* to us who love God: and that he, to whom the whole *family* of beings in heaven, in earth, and under the earth, do bow and obey, will be both now and evermore our mighty protector; too great to need our imperfect services; too good not to accept of them, when they flow from a mind humbly desirous to do his pleasure, and recommend ourselves to his favour. For though to an infinitely powerful Being nothing can be serviceable; yet to an infinitely gracious Being every thing must be acceptable, which cometh from a grateful and an humble heart, which would be and do every thing that is agreeable to him, and be and do nothing which is not so; conscious, that to him who is infinitely good in himself, every thing that is good in us must be referred: *To whom be ascribed, as is most due, all might, &c.*

SERMON VIII. On the Duty of Resignation.

JOB, ii. 10.

Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?

THESE are the words of Job, when reduced from the height of prosperity, to the lowest depth of misery. When calamities, a dire train, succeeded one after another; his wife, harassed by misfortunes, advises him to put an unnatural period to his life. But he, with that unconquered spirit, which neither his former prosperity had softened, nor his present misfortunes had broken, replied, *Thou talkest like one of the foolish, or irreligious, women*: for shall we, beings of a mixed character, expect pure and unmixed happiness from our Creator? Shall we, who do so much evil, refuse to suffer any which he sends? *Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?*

How mean and unmanly, in comparison of Job's, is the behaviour of that gloomy race of mortals, who have recourse to the instruments of death under any severe affliction, who launch out into another world, weary of the pleasures, or impatient under the pains, of this? Who, without understanding the value of life, or the true ends of living, contemptuously return back to God the present which he has made: as if what he, the Author of every good gift, had bestowed, was a trifle not worth the keeping?

Their friends may view with weeping eyes; and even an unrelenting crowd with some concern, a mangled and disfigured carcase: but men of larger views will extend their reflections farther, and lament the miseries of a wounded spirit, which has rushed unprepared into the presence of an incensed Deity. A ghastly corpse will give them the least touches of compassion: but to consider the case of a soul, that has done a fact which leaves no room for repentance, that has plunged itself into an abyss of endless misery; to consider that a new light is probably let in upon the unbodied mind, a light more sharp, powerful, and piercing, than even

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that instrument which dissolved the vital union, and divorced the soul from the body :—this is what will make the deepest impressions upon any thinking spectator. God has joined soul and body together : and *what he has joined together, let no man, unauthorised by him, put asunder.* To commit self-murder is an absolute defiance, or a desperate disbelief, of his providence. It is to dismiss ourselves from this state of probation, before God thinks fit to dismiss us : it is in effect to tell him, we will not patiently endure the chastisements which he wisely inflicts.

Not so, holy Job : he considered, that he, who sent him into the world, alone knew when he had fulfilled those ends for which he sent him ; that he alone therefore was a competent Judge, when he was to be discharged from any further service here, and to be admitted to a better state. *All my appointed time, says he, will I wait, till my change come.* It is a hard matter to determine, whether in prosperity he relieved the wants of others more generously, or in adversity bore his own miseries more patiently. In the former case, he was a *father to the fatherless*, he made the blessing of him that *was ready to perish, come upon him* : and, in the latter case, he could reflect ; *Naked came I into the world, and naked shall I return : the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away : blessed be the name of the Lord.*

To suffer undauntedly, shews a greater strength of mind than even to act greatly. For to act greatly depends upon a brisker flow of spirits, and a warmer ferment of the blood : but to suffer undauntedly, requires an uncompromising integrity, and a determinate firmness of mind. And therefore we have examples of those who have dared nobly in the field of battle, and yet have shewn a cowardly dejection of mind, when death has approached them slowly and gradually in all its pomp of terrors upon a sick-bed or a scaffold. A sudden flush of courage might animate them in the former case : but there must be a settled temper to support them in the latter ; and to act steadily, a man must think solidly.

From this famous example of resignation, I shall endeavour to shew,

I. How far we are allowed to grieve for our calamities, or how far grief is consistent with a state of resignation.

II. Upon what principles our resignation to God is to be founded.

III. I shall lay down some rules for the practice of this duty.

I. I am to shew, how far we are allowed to grieve for our calamities, or how far grief is consistent with a state of resignation.

Christianity may regulate our grief, as it does every other passion ; but does not pretend to extinguish it. Let us say what we will, and do what we can, yet ungrateful and unwelcome things will make harsh and ungrateful impressions upon us. It is a mistake to think, that even a liberal education, and a refined turn of thinking, makes men more proof against misery, than other people. No, on the other hand, our sensibility, whether of joy or misery, arises in proportion to our ingenuity. A man of a coarser frame shall slight those afflictions, which fall heavy upon a more refined disposition. The vulgar in life, as well as in the drama, are incapable of being touched by a fine distress. The same ingenuity and delicacy of mind which sheds a more lovely lustre upon prosperity, casts a deeper shade upon adversity : it imparts a more exquisite relish to every joy, but gives a keener edge to pain and misery : just as the finest glass, which transmits each kindly and enlivening beam of light, suffers the most by each contagious damp. An over-refined delicacy, however, is almost as bad an extreme, as an unfeeling stupidity : and he who is too tender to bear the least blast of adversity, is not fit to live in the world.

It is allowable, nay it is commendable, for us to feel a generous movement of soul, and to be touched with the distresses of other people : and certainly it cannot be blameable for us to be grieved at our own misfortunes : nay, I do not know, but grief in some cases is so far from being blameable, that it may be even necessary, to take off any hardness of heart ; and to make it more pliant and ductile, by melting it down. If our self-feeling be the foundation of our fellow-feeling, then, as soon as reason can shine out in its full strength, the virtues of humanity and tender-heartedness will shoot up, as from a willing soil, in a mind prepared and softened by grief, *like the tender grass springing out of the earth by*

clear shining after rain. However that be, the first starts and sallies of grief, under any calamity, are always at least pardonable: it is only a long and continued course of grief, when the soul refuses to be comforted, that is inexcusable: and it is most inexcusable, when it bears no proportion to its real cause; when it tinctures our whole way of thinking, and destroys the relish of our being; when the hours, too swift in their career during our prosperity, lag heavy and tedious, as if they were to us, what we are to ourselves, an unsupportable burthen; when the wheel of time seems clogged, and to drag along with a slow encumbered motion through the foul and rugged ways of adversity, which glided swiftly over a smooth and pleasing surface. The passions and appetites cease to be clamorous and importunate in their demands; the activity of the soul is deadened, and all its powers stand still,—all, but those of the imagination, which is then most busy, to heighten real grievances, and to call things that are not, as though they were; to call up a thousand groundless apprehensions and idle sorrows, which have no being but in thought, and then to disturb itself as much, as if they were so many realities. And it always works more strongly, in proportion to the weakness and emptiness of the mind. For which reason, it is not good for such persons, in such a forlorn and disconsolate state, to be alone. For the imagination of such men, in solitude, where reason has left a vacant space, will be sure to people the void with creatures of its own, with ghastly chimeras, visionary perplexities, and spectres of horror and distress.

Melancholy in excess is an accursed spirit, which if we resist, it will flee from us; but if we indulge it, what was for some time a pitiable weakness, becomes, at length, a deliberate crime. Violent tempestuous sorrows are like hurricanes; they soon spend themselves, and all is clear and serene again: there is more danger from a silent pensive grief, which, like a slow lingering fog, shall continue a long time, and blot the face of nature all around. That soft soothing melancholy, which some indulge, is far more injurious to the health, than the turbulent and boisterous passions; for it saps and undermines our strength by degrees,

and imperceptibly preys upon us. It gives us wrong ideas: for persons and things appear to us, just according to the dispositions we are in to receive grateful or disadvantageous impressions from them; and not as they are in their own nature. And there is as much difference between the face of things, when viewed in a cheerful serenity of temper, and when discerned in a sullen gloominess of humour; as there is between the same object, when presented to view by a clear, open, unclouded sunshine, which gives the sight its full play, and does the object full justice; and when seen by the sickly light of a lonely taper, which dims its lustre, and shades its beauty.

Whatever allowances therefore may be made for the first workings of the soft and tender passions; yet we must guard against any settled habit of grief. Because, first, While it lasts, we shall view the Deity, the world, and ourselves, in a wrong light: the melancholy damp must be done away, before the mirror can give us just and impartial images of things. Because, secondly, It is our duty to promote social happiness: now cheerfulness and inoffensive pleasantries make us agreeable to others, and others easy and happy in our company; whereas habitual melancholy spreads an universal gloom, and damps the good-humour of society. Because, thirdly, Not to enjoy with cheerfulness the blessings which remain to us, is not to treat them as what they are, viz. blessings, and consequently matters of joy and complacency; it is to act contrary to the design of our Sovereign Benefactor in pouring them upon us, who would have us *taste and see how gracious he is*. Because, fourthly, It is the same thing, whether we consume ourselves by a slow lingering poison, or dispatch ourselves by an immediate death: we are equally guilty of self-murder, whether we knowingly wear away the springs of life gradually, which is the case when we abandon ourselves to wasting grief, or we cut at once the thread of it violently asunder.

Lastly, Sorrow is criminal, when we have little or nothing to torment us, but, what is the greatest tormenter of all, our own uneasy spirit; when we create fantastical grievances, where there were none before; or aggravate them, where they were; or when we neglect the necessary

duties of life, to indulge a fruitless grief: or when we suffer grief to prey upon our vitals, without unburthening *all our care upon him, who careth for us.* When we do not consider, that either his providence will rescue us from our miseries, or his grace support us under them, or his wisdom make *all things work together for good* to us, at the last final issue and adjustment of things.

They who are continually complaining of inconveniencies, seem capable of relishing any thing but Heaven; for which a complaining temper will by no means prepare them. Whereas, not to repine at the inconveniencies we meet with here, may bring us to that place, where only there are no inconveniencies at all. And he who is not discontented with a slender portion of blessings, may have the greatest blessing of all, the Deity, to be his *portion for ever and ever.*

But this brings me,

II. To shew, upon what principle our resignation to God is to be founded.

And this is no other, than what Job founded his upon, viz. a full confidence in the Deity, that he would make the sum of his happiness, either here or hereafter, greatly exceed that of his misery. *I know, says he, that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand, at the latter day, upon the earth; and, though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another.*

To tell a man to whom life is become a burden, that *there is no help for him in his God*; but yet he must not lay violent hands upon himself, because it is eternally and indispensably fit, that a creature should be resigned to his Creator; that he is placed in the station of life by God as a soldier at his proper post, which he must not relinquish, till released by his commander, notwithstanding the inclemency of the season beats hard upon him, notwithstanding that commander will neither punish him for a breach of his duty, nor reward him for a strict performance of it: to talk thus to him, when the disadvantages of life greatly overbalanced the advantages of it, would be an affront to his understanding, and an insult upon common sense. In such an uncomfortable situation, I do not see why persons greatly distressed might not fly to death before their appointed time;

just as persons harassed with fatigues, or enfeebled by sickness, lay themselves down to rest, before the night cometh, which putteth a natural period to our labours. But prove to him, that there is a particular Providence to redress his grievances, and that his afflictions will work out for him an exceeding weight of happiness; then indeed resignation to God becomes an indispensable duty, and self-murder a crime; then he may argue, *Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive a little evil? Father, if it be possible, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.* To found virtue upon the will of God, enforced by proper sanctions, is founding it upon a rock: the rains may descend, and the storms of affliction beat hard against the structure, yet it will stand firm and unmoveable; because it is founded upon a rock, the will of God, the rock of ages. The consideration of a Being, whose power created, whose wisdom governs, and whose justice will judge the whole world, will have an influence in all cases. But arguments from the unendowed beauty of virtue, and from the abstract fitnesses of things, are of too fine and delicate a texture to combat the force of the passions, or to stand the shock of adversity.

Indeed, setting revelation aside, I know of little or nothing, that can make the present state of things supportable to a thinking mind. The hopes of a better world can alone make this, where *there is one event to the righteous and the wicked,* tolerable to us. And we know little of a future state from the light of nature. The best argument, and indeed the only one, on which any stress can be laid, is, that since there is here an undistinguishing distribution of good and evil, there will be a future state to adjust all inequalities. But this argument, though it may prove a future state in general, is very far from making out the eternity of that state, or the degree of happiness: since a much less compass of duration than eternity, a much less degree of bliss than an exceeding weight of glory, will be sufficient to set to rights all seeming disproportion and inequality of favours during the short term of our lives here below. According to the gospel-promises, *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive,*

conceive, those things which God has prepared for them that love him. All the ideas we can form of future felicity are widely disproportioned to their great originals. Suppose a man, that had been blind from his birth, should, being restored to his sight by a miracle, immediately survey the lively verdure of the earth, the arch of heaven, the glories of the sun, and the unmeasurable expanse of the creation; what raptures would he be affected with at the sudden view of a scene so entirely new to him! Much greater undoubtedly will the soul be transported with, when she shall be admitted to that fulness of bliss, which would at present overpower her feebler faculties. That God will put the repenting sinner (and the best of us are but repenting sinners) upon a much better foot hereafter, than the unrepenting, is a clear dictate of reason: but that he will admit him to a state of unallayed exceeding and everlasting happiness, without any punishment for his sins, without any intermediate state of trial and probation, without any tincture of sorrow and pain, can only be proved by revelation. So highly necessary was a revelation to ascertain these beneficial truths, that, whereas every man's death without it would be, in a great measure, what an atheistical philosopher said of his, a great leap into the dark; the promises of eternal life are, through our Saviour's merits, infinitely valuable; and, through his veracity, infallibly sure.

We cannot say, consistently with reason and modesty, that God must pardon our sins upon repentance: all that we can pretend to, is, that he may pardon them. But then the same reasons that induce us to conclude that he may pardon them, should make us apprehend, that he may not pardon them. For what God may do, that he may likewise not do; just as the *summa rerum*, the general good of the whole, requires. It must be allowed, that sins of a deeper dye are the just objects of punishment. Now, for the same reason that any sin is the just object of divine vengeance, all sin is so likewise. For all sins are of the same nature; and one differs from another only in degree. And the same right that God has to inflict punishment upon notorious sinners, the very same he has to punish proportionably, and in a less degree, every

lesser sinner. Either then we must say, that no sin whatever renders us obnoxious to divine vengeance; or it must be granted, that all sin does so too. And if so, can it be proved by the light of nature, that God will treat us hereafter, as, what we are not, innocent beings, that deserve no punishment?

Here then reason was at the end of its line, it stood upon the shore, eyed the vast ocean of eternity which lay before it, it saw a little, imagined a great deal; but clouds and darkness soon terminated its narrow prospect. Revelation, on the other hand, has enlarged our views, it insures to us, what reason could never prove, a fulness of pardon, upon our repentance, from God, without clogging it with any exceptions whatever; and an uninterrupted enjoyment of clear happiness, truth, and virtue, for ever and ever; it assures us, that this life is our only state of probation, and that in the next the good shall be as the angels of God: and were we once in that blessed state, we should be, perhaps, more reluctant to come back again to this world, though we were to enjoy the most distinguished advantages in it, than those who enjoy the most distinguished advantages in it, would be to be thrust down into a dark noisome prison. These are glorious thoughts, which ennoble the soul at all times, and support it under any fiery trial. With such animated hopes, full of a blessed immortality, the primitive Christians gave the strongest proofs of their virtue (like incense fragrant, as it consumes in the fire), at the same time that they felt the severest tortures.

They, therefore, who would disprove revelation, endeavour to deprive us of what is our best guide in the day of prosperity, and our only comfort in the day of adversity. The generality of infidels may be divided into two sorts. The greater part of them live on in one uninterrupted track of debauchery, without deviating often into thought and consideration. And these are the happy men among them, if happiness consists in want of thought: men, whose mouths speak against Christianity, from the abundance of a wicked heart; for it cannot be said, they speak against it from the abundance or fulness of the head: standing monuments of the insufficiency of that reason, which they so highly extol,

and of the necessity of that revelation, which *giveth wisdom to the simple*: men, who espouse the cause of infidelity for the same reason, or rather no reason, for which they wear a particular mode of dress, merely because it is the prevailing fashion among their acquaintance: gleaning objections, that are dropped in conversation from much shrewder men: humbly content to *gather up the crumbs that fall from their master's table*, without ever thinking for themselves, or laying in a stock of knowledge. But those few infidels, who love to be at a great expence of reading and thinking, have their minds generally overcast with black and melancholy ideas; out of humour with themselves (so far perhaps they have reason), and with every thing else; the great disturbers of the repose of mankind and their own; who are for subverting revelation, without giving, or, indeed, being able to give us any equivalent in lieu of it: the rewards and punishments discoverable by natural reason, being not clear, nor determinate enough to afford sufficient encouragement to the good, and discouragement to the bad.

To be a thoughtless Deist, is confessedly to be a fool; to be a thinking Deist, is to be a wretch: but to be a sober serious Christian, is the best way to make us tolerably easy through all the changing scenes of life; to heighten the pleasures, and lessen the miseries of it: the precepts of morality in Scripture are our best counsellors in life, and health; and the doctrine of the redemption, our only sure support at the hour of death. To be a thinking infidel, is to consider, how vain, unsatisfactory, and precarious all our present pleasures are; how soon we may be snatched from them, or they from us: it is to look upon this life, as a dream; and on the next, as one undistinguished void, one universal blank, of which he can know little or nothing, without the help of that revelation, which he rejects.

It is Christianity which teaches us to despise the follies, abhor the vices, and combat the miseries of this world; which, instead of affording such dry and jejune consolations as philosophy afforded its votaries, informs us, that afflictions are sent to wean us from this world, and fix our hopes on a better: that they are the chastisements of that Being, who

pitieth us as a father pitieth his own children: that we ought patiently to submit to natural evil, which he inflicts upon us, by way of atonement for moral evil, to expiate the secret sins of the virtuous, and to bend the stubborn minds of presumptuous sinners: that what we must feel as men, we may bear as more than men, through the grace of God, who, if he does not always proportion our trials to our natural strength, will adjust the assistances of his blessed Spirit to our exigencies, giving us the security of divine protection, at the same time that we are subject to the frailties of human nature: that, whereas we are apt to look upon the present state, as an entire, unconnected, independent, scene, which has no relation to a future state; God views both worlds at once, and considers what will be for our advantage, with regard to the whole extent of our being: that, if we make a due use of calamities, our patience under them will endear us to him; that the time will come, and must shortly be, when we shall consider all troubles in that light, in which Moses taught the Israelites to regard the Egyptians just upon the brink of the Red Sea: *These Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever*: these troubles which ye have hitherto undergone, ye shall no more undergo; pain and sorrow shall be no more, but one undetermined view of bliss for ever and ever be before you.

SERMON IX.

On Evil-speaking.

JAMES, iv. 11.

Speak not evil one of another, brethren.

IT is a melancholy consideration, that conversation runs very low; that, if any topic of religion is started, it brings us under the odious imputation of cant and hypocrisy; if any topic of useful learning, it lays us open to the censure of pedantry and ill-breeding; that if the thread of conversation be very fine, it is often immediately and abruptly broken off; but, if it be of a coarser and more homely texture, it is generally more durable and lasting. Strange! that a set of creatures, distinguished by reason and religion

religion from brutes, allied to angels, and capable of holding an intercourse with God, should rarely utter one religious sentiment worthy of a reasonable being: while several have recourse to oaths and imprecations, to fill up the mighty void of sense, and to supply the vacancy of reason; making the sacred names of their Creator and Saviour, which ought to suggest the most awful and august ideas, to be in their discourse, what they themselves are too often in the world, idle insignificant expletives.

But what falls under my present consideration, is the reigning vice of evil-speaking. I shall therefore shew,

I. The extent of the precept in my text.

II. The causes of evil-speaking;

III. The unreasonableness of it.

I. Then, I am to shew the extent of the precept in my text.

In the first place, This precept does not extend so far, as to hinder us from telling another man his faults, with a view to his amendment: we may speak evil of a man, with a design to do good to him. *Thou shalt, in any wise, rebuke thy neighbour; thou shalt not suffer sin upon him.* But we are guilty of a breach of our duty, when we give our advice in a supercilious magisterial manner, rather to shew our own authority and superiority in wisdom, than to benefit the party concerned. We must consult the gentlest manner and softest seasons of address: our advice must not fall, like a violent storm, bearing down and making that to droop, which it was meant to cherish and refresh: it must descend, as the *dew upon the tender herb*; or like melting flakes of snow; the softer it falls, the longer it dwells upon, and the deeper it sinks into the mind. If there are few who have the humility to receive advice as they ought, it is often, because there are as few who have the discretion to convey it in a proper vehicle, and to qualify the harshness and bitterness of reproof, against which corrupt nature is apt to revolt, by an artful mixture of sweetening and agreeable ingredients. To probe the wound to the bottom with all the boldness and resolution of a good spiritual surgeon, and yet with all the delicacy and tenderness of a friend, requires a very dexterous and masterly hand. An affable deportment, and a complacency of behaviour, will disarm the most obstinate:

whereas if, instead of calmly pointing out their mistakes, we break out into unseemly fallies of passion, we cease to have any influence. So far then as men tell others of their faults with an intention to reform them, and in a proper and becoming manner, so far they do not offend against the prohibition in my text.

Secondly, It is no crime to descant upon the faults of our neighbour, which are public and notorious. For where can be the harm for any man to talk of what every one knows?

Thirdly, Though nothing can justify ill-grounded uncharitable opinions; yet in cases where we have a sufficient information, a wide difference is to be made between what we say in a mixed company, and what we disclose to a particular friend, who is virtually under a covenant with us, not to betray our private conversation. For we cannot forbear to communicate our whole soul, without any reserve to him, who is, as it were, a part of our soul. To be always upon our guard, is like being always in armour: it is cumbersome and uneasy: however we may wear it for our self-defence among enemies, or persons whom we do not know to be otherwise; yet, among intimate friends, one chooses to put it off, and to be free and disengaged.

Nor, fourthly, do we act contrary to the meaning of the text, when we are called upon by lawful authority to speak what we know against a criminal. For we are not obliged to bear no witness at all against our neighbour; we are only to bear no false witness. This rule extends to giving testimonials and characters of servants, or candidates for an employment. To give them no character at all, is to all intents and purposes the same as giving them a bad one: and to give them a good character upon the whole, when they do not deserve it, is to be easy and good-natured at the expence of truth and justice.

Fifthly, We are so far from acting against the precept of my text, that it is an act of charity, as well as justice, to strip the wolf of his sheep's clothing, which he has put on to make a prey of the innocent and unsuspecting. It is a matter of great consequence to the public, that the characters of wicked men sometimes should be universally known, as well as the characters of the virtuous.

It is highly necessary, those should be undeceived, who repose a confidence in one that may bear a fair character, but is no better than a villain. Accordingly, our Saviour, who exemplified an universal good-will to mankind in all his actions, yet takes off the specious gilding from those hypocrites, who *for a pretence made long prayers, that they might devour widows houses*. He removed the thin veil of hypocrisy, and discovered those mean designs, which lurked beneath their pretensions to an uncommon sanctity. Where a man's vices only hurt himself, and terminate in his own person, there we have no right to publish them; because we can answer no good end thereby: but where they affect, or may affect, others, it is our duty to warn as many as we think proper, a due regard being had to our own safety. Only let us take this caution along with us: before we endeavour to undeceive others, let us be sure, we are not deceived ourselves. That rule which a celebrated philosopher laid down for the conduct of the understanding in judging of the truth of things, is as necessary for our conduct in judging aright of the characters of men, viz. always to suspend our judgment, till we have got clear, distinct, and decisive, evidence. Never proceed upon any slender surmises, and precarious conjectures, the workmanship of the brain. Proportion your assent to the clearness of the proofs upon which it is built.

The sum of all is this: We may speak ill of a man, after we have gained a competent knowledge, and formed a right judgment, of his character,—provided we think it necessary to detect him; either because the public good requires it, or lest any particular person, whose good we have at heart, should be infected by his company, or over-reached by his cunning: but where, as one expresseth it, there are no reasons of conscience to make a good man speak out, there are always reasons of prudence to make a wise man hold his tongue.

There is one remark, which falls under this head, that must not be omitted, viz. That we are obliged, by a principle of self-defence, to set a mark of infamy on those who have injuriously branded the reputation of their neighbours. For he who has injured one person, either in his reputation or fortune, threatens every

body. And therefore common prudence will teach us to give such a man his just character, that he may not be able to make disadvantageous impressions upon the unwary and undesigning, by giving every man else a bad one.

If a man's vices are so flagrant, and his character so infamous, that there is no danger he should impose upon others; what are we to do in such a case? I do not say, it is unlawful to speak evil of him: but the less we say of him, so much, I think, the better; unless it be our design to raise an indignation in ourselves or others against the like practices. To be often inveighing against his vices, however notorious, looks as if we took a complacency in dwelling on his faults. And it is not the property of *charity*, or of a charitable man, to *rejoice in iniquity*. *Let the dead bury their dead*: let those that are dead to all sentiments of virtue, delight to throw dirt upon men in the same state with themselves.

It may be asked, whether it be lawful to speak ill of the dead: and the answer is, that it either must be lawful in some cases, and under proper restrictions; or we must condemn all historians (the sacred ones not excepted), who have transmitted the faults as well as virtues of the dead to posterity. There is a tenderness due to the memories of those who are no longer in a capacity to speak for themselves: and therefore we ought to be very careful not to charge any crimes upon them, of which we have not strong authentic proofs, either from personal knowledge, or from persons of unsuspected veracity. Where there is even a faint probability, that the fact, of which they are accused, might be otherwise than it is represented, there we ought to be silent. But where the facts are so notorious, that they admit of no doubt; so flagrantly bad, that they need no aggravation; there we ought to consider, that there is a curse denounced upon the wicked, that their memories should rot; as there is a promise to the righteous, that they should be had in remembrance, and their memories be embalmed. It is wrong likewise to speak evil of the dead, for the sake of evil-speaking, without a view to the information of the living.

Lastly, Though it is our duty not to speak ill of any man, without some of the reasons which I have mentioned; yet

it does not follow, that we ought to speak well of every body promiscuously, and in general: because we ought to make a distinction, where there is a difference, we ought to pay the tribute of praise, where praise is due; otherwise we rob the good of that fame, which is a debt to merit only, by putting all mankind upon a level. He who commends every one, in effect commends no one at all. An undistinguishing praise confounds the characters of men, as well as an undistinguishing censure: just as overmuch light has the same effect, as overmuch darkness; we see nothing as it really is. By throwing an undistinguished glare of praise on every object, we perceive no object at all in its just and genuine light. There has been so much prostitution of applause, that scarce any commendation is valuable, but what comes from those who can discommend with impunity, and commend without an expectation of a reward.

II. Having thus stated the extent of this duty, I proceed to point out the causes of evil-speaking.

The first of which is an affectation of wit.

To do justice to a great and good character, requires an uncommon judgment, delicacy, and discernment. But nothing is more easy than to turn any person, however deserving, into ridicule: it is only to exchange one idea, which furnishes no matter for ridicule, for another near akin to it which does; that of seriousness, for instance, and a composed behaviour, for that of a stiff formality and solemnity; and then the work is done. The vulgar may be easily made to mistake the one for the other: and when they have once viewed a valuable person in a ridiculous light, they are scarce capable ever after of considering him in any other: the ludicrous representation recurs to their memory, as often as the person thus misrepresented offers himself to view. Thus what is only the sport of a wanton fancy, may be worse than death to an innocent man.

But whatever pleasure men of this turn may take in ridicule, it is better to be innocently dull, than to have all the wit in the world, and yet, by the misapplication of it, to make one worthy man one's foe. One humane and generous sentiment is of more worth, than all the merely ludicrous and witty thoughts that ever were. For one humane sentiment towards our fellow-

creatures touches the heart, and diffuses a sedate and lasting complacency there: but thoughts merely witty and ludicrous only please the fancy for a while, and raise a blaze of mirth as short-lived as *the crackling of thorns*, to which Solomon compares it. An ill-natured man may be a prodigy of parts; he may have an uncommon brightness, but then it is, like that of a summer's sun, an intolerable brightness; to shun its scorching beams, we retreat to the shade, and had rather bury ourselves in retirement, than endure his conversation. That wit is truly amiable, which gladdens and enlivens every thing; which shines with a lustre gentle, but not faint, and powerful, but not glaring.

He who endeavours to oblige the company by his good-nature, never fails of being beloved; he who strives to entertain it by his good sense, never fails of being esteemed: but he who is continually aiming to be witty, generally miscarries of his aim: his aim and intention is to be admired, but it is his misfortune either to be despised or detested; to be despised for want of judgment, or detested for want of humanity. For we seldom admire the wit, when we dislike the man. There are a great many to whom the world would be so charitable, as to allow them to have a tolerable share of common sense, if they did not set up for something more than common, something very uncommon, bright, and witty. If we would trace the faults of conversation up to their original source, most of them might, I believe, be resolved into this; that men had rather appear shining, than be agreeable in company: they are endeavouring to raise admiration, instead of gaining love and good-will: whereas the latter is in every body's power, the former in that of very few.

The second cause is an hastiness or precipitancy in judging, before we know the whole of the case. Nothing is more common than to pronounce, with a decisive air, upon a man's whole character from a suspicious circumstance; and that too in cases where none but those who are intimate with him can have decisive evidence. Actions appear absurd, which are yet founded upon weighty and substantial reasons, known to the party concerned, but unknown to us. The motive he acts upon may be a secret confined to his own breast.

breast. Several have, I believe, incurred the imputation of covetousness, who really could not have expended more than they did, without being injurious to their families, and perhaps to their creditors.

A single circumstance slip in, will envenom a whole relation; and there may be often a circumstance omitted, which would give quite another turn to the whole. Incline always to the favourable side, when things are doubtful. If you should be mistaken on the charitable side, God will overlook your mistake, and accept your charity. But if you mistake through uncharitableness,—all that I shall say is, may your hearers consider your *investives* with judgment, and your Maker with mercy.

3. A third cause is malice. A good-natured man will be far from thinking, that nothing can give life and spirit to conversation, but scandal and raillery: he will take care, that, after some hours spent in his company, none shall reflect upon any expression of his, which shall dwell upon their minds with pain and uneasiness. Whereas unhappy tempers take a sullen satisfaction in blasting characters: and it must be owned, they have often a very unlucky turn that way; keen glances of censure proceeding generally from a dark involved temper, like flashes of lightning from a gloomy sky.

Or perhaps a malicious man shall go a more artful way to work. “Such a man,” says he, “has several good qualities, and I cannot say but I have an esteem for him. But what a pity is it that he should act in so ridiculous a manner, as he has done lately? I am heartily sorry for it; I know more than I will say; but I love not to dwell upon faults.” Thus he shall express a world of sorrow for his neighbour’s misconduct; when, after all this extraordinary concern, he shall not fail to set it out in the most aggravating circumstances: he shall express more than is true, and intimate more than he expresses: he shall introduce what he has to say against a man, with a recital of some valuable qualities, on purpose to give himself an air of impartiality; and then shall usher in a character, which would not be received from a declared enemy, or an angry man. A malignant praise has been always the most successful vehicle to in-

nuate slander, as poison is never more artfully conveyed than in perfumes.

It must be observed, for the honour of human nature, that a much larger majority in towns and villages are the peaceful and inoffensive inhabitants: except in very large and populous places, there are not, generally speaking, above five or six troublesome intermeddling persons, enemies unto peace, and the pests of society. And yet these, by forging falsehoods, and grafting upon the truth several inflaming circumstances, by misrepresenting what is innocent, perverting what is good, and aggravating what is evil, shall disturb the peace of the whole neighbourhood, spread lies, and foment divisions. I do not know what pleasure men of this stamp may take, in supposing themselves to stand clear of those vices, which they charge upon others. But this I dare venture to say, that the same meanness and littleness of soul, which makes them so inquisitive to know, so glad to hear, and so industrious to spread any fault of others, would make them commit the very same, provided they had the same temptations and complexion. For vice proceeds from nothing, but the meanness and baseness of a depraved soul.

To this class of ill-natured persons those must be reduced, who love, as they express it, to speak their minds upon all occasions, privileged talkers; affronting those above them, insulting those beneath them, and displeasing every body. But if they will always speak freely what they think, they should first take care to think justly, as they ought, tenderly of others, humbly and soberly of themselves.

The most delicate pleasure, is to impart it to our fellow-creatures; complaisant, but never insipid; frank, but never rude and unguarded; general in our civility to all the company, and particular to each person by turns; when the discourse is directed to us, lending a favourable attention, and making pertinent replies; like a fine picture, which seems to fix an eye upon, and direct its views, to each person in the room, who looks upon it, and eyes it attentively. And if politeness (politeness I mean as to the main essentials) be an attention to say and do those things only, which may send others away pleased with themselves and us, as far as is consistent with reason and truth; then certainly politeness is a part of

of natural and revealed religion, the latter of which expressly commands us to be courteous; it is good-nature beautified and refined by art; good-nature, which, like the Author of nature, is not *extreme to mark what is done amiss*. Charity, the most lovely of virtues, represents others as lovely as possible. It does not merely let us see an object, as it is; it is a kind of sunshine, which brightens what it lets us see. Whereas ill-nature passes over all the shining parts of a man's character, and dwells entirely on the dark side of it: as a painter of low rank shall throw those beauties into darkness and shade, which his eye cannot endure to behold, because his hand cannot reach them.

The fourth cause of evil-speaking is envy, or an uneasiness, arising from a reflection that the persons envied are our superiors in fortune, or other abilities. This prompts us to depreciate their worth, and to bring down their character to a level with ours; since we cannot advance ours to the same eminence. We cannot outstrip them by fair and direct means; and therefore we endeavour basely to supplant them.

Men of solid sense and virtue seldom envy others, or think themselves despised: because few or none are apt to think themselves slighted, except those that deserve to be so: they, on the other hand, have that genuine feeling, that inward consciousness of goodness, that home-felt satisfaction, which the vain and conceited may pretend to, but never truly perceive. This makes them never out of humour with themselves; and when men are not out of humour with themselves, they see and represent others in the most lovely light. One need not envy any person, nor consequently detract from him. Let a person be our better, as he is called; provided he is not our better in, what is best of all, religion and virtue. The virtuous and the good are the only persons to be envied; if there were not a better way to be taken, which is to make ourselves as virtuous and good as they are, by doing all the good we can, and purposing more than we can do.

The fifth cause is little personal animosities, just after a supposed or real injury, where there is no settled malice. And therefore it would be a good rule, that, before our passions are thoroughly cooled, we make a resolution to speak all the

good we know of our adversary: but if we cannot do this, that then we resolve never to speak of him at all any further than our own self-defence obligeth us: because whatever good qualities we can allow him at that juncture, those, we may depend upon it, he has; but the ill qualities, with which we find a strong inclination to charge him, those, perhaps, he has not. For let your knowledge of mankind be never so great, yet you never can see persons or things in a true light, unless you view them coolly and dispassionately: the same sober and dispassionate temper, which qualifies a man for an inquiry into the truth of things, enabling him likewise to form a just judgment of the characters of persons. Observe, what your sentiments of the same person are, after he has done you some signal favour, and you will find this to be strictly true; you will find the judgment which you formed in the heat of your temper, entirely reversed. Let this then be the fixed determination of your mind, to forbear all offensive words and actions, till you are calm enough to examine the affair minutely, and to give it a rehearing. Take it for granted, that whatever the ferment of passion suggests, is either entirely, or at least in some measure, false. We all *see through a glass darkly*; but passion makes us see through a glass falsely, which magnifies injuries beyond their due proportion. This we all acknowledge in our cooler hours, yet it is ten to one we most unaccountably forget it upon the next provocation. Such is our nature, and it is amazing, that he who has studied it, and knows his own weaknesses, should be severe upon any body but himself.

The sixth cause of evil-speaking is an ill life in general. Those who know a great deal of ill of themselves, are apt to suspect ill of every body else. *Thou thoughtest wickedly, that I was such an one as thyself*, is the character which the psalmist gives of an immoral person. They accuse people of wickedness, which they do not know to be true; and censure them for what they cannot know to be true, viz. their intentions, and the thoughts of their hearts. They shall fancy, as Nero did, all to be inwardly as bad as themselves; though some are more artful to save appearances. Thus their talk is a constant satire upon others, and their actions a living satire upon themselves. Let them say what hard things

things they please, they can do much harder things than they say. Their foul language is nothing but the overflowings of a much fouler heart.

The seventh cause of evil-speaking is talkativeness. There are several who have neither a fund of sense enough to talk well, nor modesty enough to be silent. They must either act the part of mutes upon the stage of life; or they must have recourse to the standing topics of conversation, which are to defame public parties, or vilify particular men. It is beneath the worthy to go *about as a talebearer among the people*; that is the province of the worthless; mere leaden pipes: though the metal be dull, base, and ignoble, they serve to convey fresh streams of intelligence to every place: we apply gold, and the nobler metals, to other uses.

It must, however, be owned, that men, who deserve well in other respects, shall be sometimes guilty of this fashionable vice; either because, though they have a general and standing conviction that evil-speaking is a crime, yet they do not consider and attend to the malignity of it at that juncture; or because the commonness of the crime insensibly reconciles it to their thoughts: they see it practised every day, and that makes it familiar to them, and takes off every idea of horror. To obviate those ill effects, which custom may have, let us consider;

III. The unreasonableness of evil-speaking.

For men are not more mistaken in any thing, than in the estimate they make of crimes. They seem to judge of them more from their uncommonness, than from the baneful consequences which attend them. Whatever crime is uncommon, is surprising, and consequently more shocking, than others perhaps of a deeper dye, which, because we see them committed every day, we therefore think very small, or no crimes at all. They do not excite that striking disgust and aversion, which they would do, if more unusual and infrequent. It is observable, that in fashions, opinions, and modes of dress, nothing seems absurd, to which men have been accustomed from their infancy. It is the same in sins: nothing moves horror, that is familiar to us. To rob a man of his good name, is not so shocking a vice as to rob him of a sum of money: yet he who does the latter, knows how

much he has taken, and what restitution to make: but it is impossible for him who does the former, to make an adequate judgment, how much the injured person has suffered, and what reparation he ought to make; for he cannot tell what advantages the person might have received, if no disadvantageous impressions had been given of him.

Many value reputation more than life, which without reputation is but a burden. The tongue therefore that wounds that, may be a sharper sword, than any other, which can only hurt the body. He whose *teeth are spears and arrows*, may pierce deeper to the heart, than if he, in a literal sense, employed those weapons against his adversary.

It is certain, that, according to the common saying, so much reputation is so much power; and in proportion to men's credit, esteem, and character, in the world, their weight, influence, and power to do themselves and others good will be greater and more extensive. In some stations of life, to deprive a man of his good name, is to deprive him of his livelihood, of his all in this world, as in matters of trade and commerce; and in all stations and callings, a great deal depends upon the character which we maintain; and whatever sullies the brightness of our reputation, lessens our usefulness.

Let us consider, whether it would do the world or ourselves any harm, if that scandal, that precious knowledge, of which we are so communicative, should die with us. If it would not do any harm, then it is one of the first principles of morality, not to give others pain and uneasiness, not to wound them, either in mind or body, without a sufficient cause, without a design to compass some valuable end; and take it for granted, whatever pleasure you may feel in giving utterance to ill-natured suggestions, there is a much greater in stifling them. But if *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth must speak*; if the fulness of your soul, impatient to asperse others upon every occasion, upon no occasion must have a vent; then you are certainly in the very *gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity*. On the contrary, what commendations does he deserve, who, at the same time that he has too much good sense to think well of the worthless, has too much charity to speak ill of them, when there is no necessity for it?

What,

What, if a person, who in the main has led a good life, should yet, contrary to the general tenor of it, be guilty of some unaccountable weakness? What should we learn from this? Not certainly some poor materials for idle conversation, in which, whatever expence of words there may be, there is no expence at all of thought: no, it ought to teach us something far more useful and noble, a lesson of diffidence of ourselves, watchfulness, and circumspection; lest we, who *think we stand*, should also *fall*. The miscarriages of a good man, which give an ill-natured pleasure to little minds, suggest to every great mind the most melancholy ideas of the weakness of human nature in general, but no spiteful and venomous reflections against his weakness in particular. Far from insulting over his fallen worth, he views his downfall with a generous pity, and warned by it, *works out his own salvation with fear and trembling*. As when the young, the blooming, and the vigorous, who bade fair for length of days, yet pine away, or are cut off by some sudden sickness; it teacheth us to be more temperate, and cautious, to preserve the health of the body: so when the good and virtuous, from whose former actions we might expect an uninterrupted course of piety, are overtaken, we scarce know how, in any notorious and flagrant vice; this should put us upon our guard, and make us take all due precautions to preserve the health of the soul. This is the use we are to make of these pitiable instances: they are no subjects for wanton merriment, pleasantry, and witty spleen: no, they are subjects for a serious consideration on our own frailty: they teach us not to be too sanguine, or over-secure. "Tell me, O my conscience, have I ever done, or shall I ever do, any thing like this?" Would to God we would talk and commune oftener with ourselves: we should the seldomer talk vainly about ourselves, and uncharitably about others.

Lastly, It is no unusual thing to hear some complaining, that their abilities to do good, and to abound in works of charity, are cramped within a narrow sphere, though their inclinations are very large and extensive. Now, if these men are in earnest, I will point out one kind of charity, which will not be expensive to themselves, and yet endear them to their fel-

low creatures. Their circumstances may not enable them to cherish merit by their generosity, and to relieve distress by their charity: but this charitable office is daily in their power, to cast in shades their neighbours' misconducts, and to set out in the most advantageous point of view their good qualities; to extenuate their failings, and to do justice to their virtues; to produce an obscure character into light, and to rescue an injured one from obloquy. *Silver and gold* they may *have* little or *none*: but *such as they have* they may *give*, viz. what is better than silver and gold, a *good name* and reputation to their neighbours.

I shall conclude with some advice to those who suffer in their reputation.

Let them consider, that "if the *invections* against them are true, they ought rather to correct themselves, than make reprisals upon others: but if false, a contempt of them will destroy the belief of them; but a concern will argue the truth of them." Let them endeavour to *put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, by well doing*. Let them make it their business to acquire a sufficient stock of merit; and great merit, like light, cannot be entirely concealed; though it is most amiable, when it does not shew itself in too open and full a glare. The veil of modesty cannot long hide genuine worth, any more than the mask of hypocrisy can long cover our vices. He who is substantially good, will, in despite of all defamation, ere long appear so. The arrow may be drawn to the head, and levelled with a dexterous aim; but cannot reach a virtue, which rises to an uncommon height. Let them, lastly, put their trust in that Being, *who will make their righteousness as clear as the light, and their just dealing as the noon-day*.

S E R M O N X.

On the Love of God.

MARK, xii. 30.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment.

It is the improved ability of the head that forms the philosopher; but it is the right disposition of the heart that chiefly

chiefly makes the Christian. It is our love directed to that Being who is most worthy of it; as the centre, in which all excellencies unite, and the source from which all blessings proceed.

Love is the fulfilling of the law. It is not the mere action that is valuable in itself. It is the love from which it proceeds, that stamps a value upon it, and gives an endearing charm and beauty to it. When a servile fear ingrosses the whole man, it locks up all the active powers of the soul, it cramps the abilities, and is rather a preservative against sin, than an incentive to virtue. But love quickens our endeavours, and emboldens our resolutions to please the object beloved; and the more amiable ideas we entertain of our master, the more cheerful, liberal, and animated the service, that we render him, will consequently be.

Upon love therefore the Scriptures have justly laid the greatest stress, that love, which will give life and spirit to our performances. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment.*

In discoursing on which words, I shall,

- I. Inquire into the nature and foundation of our love to God;

- II. I shall endeavour to state the measure and degree of it;

- III. I shall examine, how far the fear of the Deity is consistent with the love of him.

- I. I shall inquire into the nature and foundation of our love to the Deity.

The love of God may be defined a fixed, habitual, and grateful regard to the Deity, founded upon a sense of his goodness, and expressing itself in a sincere desire to do whatever is agreeable, and avoid whatever is offensive, to him.

The process of the mind I take to be this:

The mind considers, that goodness is every where stamped upon the creation, and appears in the work of the redemption in distinct and bright characters: it considers, in the next place, that goodness, a lovely form, is the proper object of love and esteem; and goodness to us, the proper object of gratitude. But as goodness exists no where but in the imagination, without some good being, who

is the subject of it; it goes on to consider, that love, esteem, and gratitude, is a tribute due to that being, in whom an infinite fulness of goodness ever dwells, and from whom emanations of goodness are ever flowing. Nor does the mind rest here; it takes one step farther to reflect, that a cold speculative esteem, and a barren, inactive gratitude, is really no sincere esteem or gratitude at all; which will ever vent itself in strong endeavours to imitate, a delight to please, and a desire to be made happy by the being beloved.

If we attend to what is here advanced, the dispute whether the love of God be disinterested or no, may be the more easily adjusted: and all the confusion upon this head has arose from considering the love of God under a partial and imperfect view, from considering it merely as a philosophical esteem for him, without taking into the account, what the love of God chiefly implies, a sincere and effectual desire to recommend ourselves to the favour, approbation, and blessing of that being whom we esteem. If the love of God be considered merely as a sacred esteem for him, it is in a great measure disinterested. For interest may indeed teach us to speak a language foreign to our heart: but we cannot really esteem any person, till we think him worthy of our esteem; and then it is that thought, not interest, which is productive of our esteem. It is then the natural result of a serious consideration, that he is a being, in whom there resides a full assemblage of each lovely and endearing quality, without the least jarring mixture of any thing harsh, cruel, or tyrannical in his nature; that he wills the happiness of each individual in the creation, as far as it is consistent with his particular rank and station in the scale of beings, and the good of the universe in general. When a man has inured himself to such a just and right way of thinking upon the Deity, he cannot help loving, in the sense of esteem, what appears, upon repeated views, so lovely to his understanding. He cannot help loving him, whom he believes to be, what St. John has represented him, love itself, pure, unallayed love, without any tincture of caprice, malice, or ill-nature.

For to whatever cause such a connection of ideas was originally owing, yet in fact

fact the ideas of goodness and esteem are in most minds inseparably connected. The union seems almost necessary. If it were an early association, it is such an association as cannot easily, if at all, be broken.

But if the love of God be considered not only as a mere esteem for him, but what it undoubtedly and principally is, an hearty and effectual desire to recommend ourselves to his love, favour, and approbation; the love of God, so far at least is interested; and, though we may esteem him for what he is in himself, yet we desire to approve ourselves to him, in expectation of what he will do for us.

For what rational end or motive could there be to endeavour to please a being, who would neither shew his pleasure by rewarding the obedient, or express his displeasure by punishing the obnoxious? Those that make the love of God disinterested, drop the most material and essential part of it, that very part which chiefly makes it a practical principle, operating upon our hearts, and productive of holiness in our lives; and give us a lame and imperfect account of it.

For love is not only a cold sedentary esteem, which, like *faith without works, is dead*: it is an active principle, which prompts us to secure an interest, and cultivate a friendship, with the being beloved; and to feel a delightful self-complacency, when we please, or imagine we please, him. It is a compound of an esteem for him arising from an apprehension of his excellencies, and a desire to be made happy by him here and hereafter. Had we no desire or expectations to be made happy by him, we should not serve him at all: and had we no esteem for him, did we not entertain the loveliest impressions of him, we should not serve him with pleasure. Dry and abstracted reasons of love to God operate very faintly, except we take into the account the affecting considerations of his being our Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Benefactor. His internal and essential excellency may command our admiration, sling us into astonishment, and convince the understanding that we ought to reverence him: but his relative dignity, his making, supporting, and redeeming us, touch the inmost springs of the mind, call forth each liberal move-

ment of the soul, and powerfully work upon our wills and affections, the active principles in our composition.

If it be objected, that we cannot love being that is invisible, I answer, that what we chiefly love in visible beings of our own kind, is always something invisible. Whence arises the relish of beauty in our own species? Do we love it merely as it is, a certain mixture of proportion and colours? No: for though these are to be taken into the account as two material ingredients; yet something else is wanting to beget our love; something, that animates the feature, and bespeaks a mind within. Otherwise, we might fall in love with a mere picture, or any lifeless mass of matter, that was entertaining to the eye. We might be as soon smitten with a dead, uninformed, unmeaning, countenance, where there is an exact symmetry and regularity of features; as with those faces, which are enlivened by a certain cheerfulness, ennobled by a certain majesty, or endeared by a certain complacency, diffused over their whole mien. Is not this therefore the chief foundation of our taste for beauty, that it giveth us, as we think, some outward notices of noble, benevolent, and valuable qualities in the mind? Thus a sweetness of mien and aspect charms the more, because we look upon it as an indication of a much sweeter temper within: it is the habitual disposition of the soul, appearing through, and impressed upon, the features. The face is often, though not always, the index of the mind; and those ideas to which the soul is most habituated, leave behind them certain traces and impressions on the countenance. Now, if this be the chief (I do not say it is the only) source of our taste for beauty, that it exhibits to us some signatures of inward benevolence, generosity, and worth, which, after all, are very uncertain, and only presumptive evidences of the internal temper; why have we not the most affectionate love for that being, the traces of whose benevolence, bounty, and greatness, are imprinted upon the universe in bright, legible, and undeniable, characters?

In a word, though the Deity cannot be seen, numerous instances of his goodness are visible throughout the frame of nature: and wherever they are seen, they naturally command our love. But

we

we cannot love goodness abstractedly from some being, in which it is supposed to inhere: for that would be to love an abstract idea. Hitherto indeed it is only the love of esteem: the transition, however, from that, to a love of enjoyment, or a desire of being made happy by him, is quick and easy; for the more lovely ideas we entertain of any being, the more desirous we shall be to do his pleasure, and procure his favour.

Having thus shewn the foundation of our love to God, I proceed, secondly, to state the degree, and point out the measure, of our love to him.

In order to which, it will be necessary to fix the sense of the words of my text with some accuracy; because from them, such a degree of love to God has been pleaded for, as is inconsistent with any subordinate desires of inferior things. The meaning of these words, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength*, is, that we are to serve God with all those faculties which he has given us: not that the love of God is to be exclusive of all other loves; but of all other rival affections; that whenever the love of God and that of the world come in competition, the former undoubtedly ought to take place of the latter. According to that of our Saviour, *He that loveth father and mother more than me, is not worthy of me*: and again, *Seek ye first the kingdom of God*; which supposes, that other things may be sought after in their proper rank and order, without an undue preference. We are not to desire nothing at all but him; we are only, as the psalmist expresses it, to desire nothing in comparison with him. Visionary writers, who have sequestered themselves from the world, may attempt to prove, that all our love ought to centre in the Deity exclusively: but such romantic notions are unintelligible in theory, and in fact impracticable. They convince us of nothing but this; that those whose understandings are over refined and subtle, are guilty of as great errors, as those whose understandings are waxed gross; and that it is hard to tell, whether men mistake oftener by not exerting their abilities, or by stretching them beyond their line, beyond their determinate sphere. If the one grovel on the ground, the other are

continually soaring into the clouds, quite beyond the view of common sense. Instead of seeing all things in the Deity, as some have fancied, we discern plain proofs of the Deity in all things; there being nothing in nature, of which we can give a plausible account, without calling in the Deity to our aid. We have no direct and immediate view of him, as he is in himself; we see him *through a glass*, through the mirror of the creation. And if there were nothing lovely, and consequently the object of our love, in the creature, we could have no grounds to love the Creator. The love of the Creator therefore implies the love of the creation. Not being able to see him *face to face*, we love him in his works, the representatives, the faint representatives, of his original loveliness. Accordingly St. John says, *If any man love not his brother, whom he hath seen; how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?* that is, the visible creation, and man, the masterpiece of the visible creation, being the only mediums through which we discern the loveliness of God, represented and reflected to us, if we have a splenetic hatred and disrelish for them, how can we entertain any love for the Maker of them, of whom we can know nothing, but by and through them? They are the steps and scales by which we must ascend, in the last resort, to the love of him, from whom they derive, and to whom we must ascribe, whatever is good in them. To love God therefore with all our heart, is so far from excluding all inferior complacencies, that it necessarily comprehends him. Our love must begin with the creature, and end in him: we must love, as well as argue, upwards, from the effect to the cause; and because there are several things desirable, even here, under proper regulations, conclude that he, the Maker of them, ought to be the supreme, not the only object of our desires. We cannot love God in himself, without loving him in and for his works.

What the Scriptures require, is easy to be understood, and not impossible to be practised, viz. That our gratitude to God, and our love of him, ought to have the ascendant, and to be the governing principle; and that all other regards ought to be subordinate to it. The main design of Christianity is, that we

we should look upon worldly things with the indifference of a traveller, whose chief views are fixed upon his journey's end, upon his abiding country.

The words of my text may be more minutely explained thus: *To love the Lord with all our heart*, signifies to love him with all sincerity, with an undissembled affection. For in this sense, the word is often used in Scripture. Thus Isaiah, *This people draweth nigh unto me with their lips, but their heart is far from me*; i. e. they are not affectionate and sincere in the service they pay me. As some have strained this duty too high, others have sunk it much too low, and made the love of God, and the keeping of his commandments, to be the very same thing. Whereas to love God is not merely to do what he commands, but it is to do it, because he commands it. God, who is the searcher of hearts, does not value any outward homage, where the heart is not interested.

To love God with all our soul, signifies to serve him with the whole soul, with an unreserved, and not with a partial, obedience. God is not to share a divided affection in our breast, an affection divided between piety and sin: but he is to reign unrivalled by any darling vice. *To love God then with all our soul*, is the same as to have respect unto all his commandments. For it is no proof of our love to God, that we obey him only, when our passions do not draw a different way: then is our heart right and whole with him, when our duty gets the better over any corrupt inclination, which interferes with it. We are not to parcel out our affections between piety and sin: then is our affection like a large diamond, most valuable when it remains entire and unbroken, without being cut out into a multitude of independent and disjointed parts.

To love the Lord with all our strength, is to put forth the active powers of the soul in loving and serving him. It is to rouse ourselves from that supineness and listless idleness, which is far more painful than a continued hurry and multiplicity of business, without any respite. It is to quicken the wheels and springs of action, that moved on heavily before; it is to do well, without being weary of well-doing. It is to lay out our endeavours, that we may have a competent sense to discern, a sincere inclination to embrace, and a

steady resolution to hold fast, what is best and most pleasing to the Deity.

The sum of what I would say is this, that to *love God with all our heart*, is to obey him sincerely and affectionately: *to love him with all our souls, and with all our minds*, is to obey him entirely and unreservedly: and to *love him with all our strength*, is to obey him vigorously and constantly.

The love of God is a settled, well-grounded, rational, delight in him, founded upon conviction and knowledge. It is seated in the understanding, and therefore not necessarily accompanied with any brisker agitations of spirit; though, indeed, the body may keep pace with the soul, and the spirits flow in a more sprightly torrent to the heart; when we are affected by any advantageous representation of God, or by a reflection on his blessings. This I thought necessary to observe, because some weak men of a sanguine complexion are apt to be elated upon the account of those short-lived raptures and transient gleams of joy, which they feel within themselves; and others of a phlegmatic constitution to despond, because they cannot work themselves up to such a degree of fervour. Whereas nothing is more precarious and uncertain, than that affection which depends upon the ferment of the blood: it naturally ceases, as soon as the spirits flag, and are exhausted. Men of this make sometimes draw near to God with great fervency, and at other times are quite estranged from him, like those great bodies which make very near approaches to the sun, and then all at once fly off to an unmeasurable distance from the source of light. You meet a person at some happy time, when his heart overflows with joy and complacency, he makes you warm advances of friendship, he gives you admittance to the inmost secrets of his soul, and prevents all solicitation, by offering, unasked, those services, which you, in this soft and gentle season of address, might have been encouraged to ask: wait but till this flush of good humour and flow of spirits is over, and you will find all this overwarmth of friendship settle into coldness and indifference; and himself as much differing from himself, as any other person can from another: whereas a person of a serious frame and composure of mind, consistent with himself, and there-

fore constant to you, goes on, without any alternate heats and colds in friendship, in an uninterrupted tenor of serving, and obliging his friend. Which of these two is more valuable in himself, and acceptable to you? The answer is very obvious. Just so a vein of steady, regular, consistent piety, is more acceptable to that Being, *with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of change*, than all the passionate sallies, and short intermitting fits of an unequal devotion.

Truly to love God is not then to have a few warm notions about the Deity fluttering a while in the breast, and afterwards leaving it void and empty of goodness. But it is to have the love of God dwelling in us. It is not a religious mood or humour, but a religious temper. It is not to be now and then pleased with our Maker in the gaiety of the heart, when, more properly speaking, we are pleased with ourselves. It is not to have a few occasional transient acts of complacency and delight in the Lord rising in our minds, when we are in a vein of good humour, as the seed in the parable soon sprung up, and soon withered away, because it *had no root and deepness of earth*; but it is to have a lasting, habitual, and determinate, resolution to please the Deity rooted and grounded in our hearts, and influencing our actions throughout.

III. I proceed to examine how far the fear of the Deity is consistent with the love of him.

There is mercy with thee, therefore shalt thou be feared, is a passage in the Psalms very beautiful, as well as very apposite to our present purpose. It is the secret of fine writing to make our thoughts natural without being common or too obvious, and surprising without being affected. And here we have an admirable exemplification of this rule. The thought is surprising; because it was obvious to think the sentence should have concluded thus: *There is mercy with thee, therefore shalt thou be loved*: and yet it is natural too, since we shall be afraid to draw upon ourselves his displeasure, whom we sincerely love. The more we have an affection for him, the more we shall dread a separation from him. Love, though it casteth out all servile fear, yet does not exclude such a fear, as a dutiful son shews to a very affectionate, but a very wise and prudent father: and we may rejoice

in God with reverence, as well as serve him with gladness. For love, if not alloyed and tempered with fear, and the apprehensions of divine justice, would betray the soul into a sanguine confidence and an ill-grounded security: fear, on the other hand, if not sweetened and animated by love, would sink the mind into a fatal despondency. Fear therefore is placed in the soul, as a counterpoise to the more enlarged, kindly, and generous affections. It is in the human constitution, what weights are to some machines, very necessary to adjust, regulate, and balance the motion of the fine, curious, and active springs.

Happy the man who can command such a just and even poise of these two affections, that the one shall do nothing, but deter him from offending, while the other inspirits him with a hearty desire of pleasing the Deity. Yet, which soever of them we may imagine to be the prevailing principle, he who proceeds in a steady regular practice of his duty to God, without any presumptuous and deliberate sins, may dismiss all apprehensions and misgivings concerning his salvation. It is true, *God is love*; and he that obeys him, must obey him in love: but it is as true, that, wherever there is a sincere and uniform obedience, upon principle, there is such a degree of love, as will render us acceptable to God. For *in this we know, that we love God, if we keep his commandments*. A mere servile fear indeed may be a bar to our salvation. But what is a mere servile fear? Such a fear as clogs the powers, and deadens the activity of the soul, by shutting out the consideration of God's fatherly goodness, and dwelling only on that of almighty power armed with vengeance; such a fear as the unprofitable servant, in the parable of the talents, entertained of his master, whom he misrepresented as an austere being, gathering where he had not sown, and reaping where he had not sown; for which reason he remained in a state of inaction, and hid his talent in a napkin. It is such a fear as the devils have, who believe and tremble, yet never obey; one genuine blackness of darkness, without the least glimpse of comfort. It is a religious cowardice, which robs us of the power of shunning those dangers which we dread.

But a fear which is productive of an even

even stedfast habit of obedience, is always a filial fear, recommended and endeared by an acceptable mixture and proportion of love. For, till a slavish dread dramps each lovely idea, and blots out each liberal thought of the Deity, our love of him is not extinguished: and when a slavish dread has erased these impressions, then our obedience, as well as love, must cease of course. The mind will stoop beneath the burden, and sink overwhelmed with a load of despair. It is, methinks, impossible that any man should habitually, in the main, and conscientiously discharge his duty to the *Father of mercies and God of comforts*, who is able and willing to do for him *abundantly above what he can ask or think*, without esteeming, honouring, and loving him. He may indeed, at first, obey him only, because it is his duty to serve the greatest of beings, whose power *ruleth over all*: but he will sooner or later obey him likewise, because it is his inclination to serve the best of beings, whose *mercy is over all his works*. Suppose a man lost in a great measure to all ingenuous motives, yet, persuaded by the terrors of the Lord to break off his sins by repentance, he could not effectually set about this work without some regard to God's amiable attributes, without some confidence in his goodness, which always implies some degree of love. He may fear him, as an *avenger to execute wrath* upon the impenitent; but he must confide in him too, as one that is not willing any should be impenitent; not willing that any should perish, but that all should fulfil the terms, and enjoy the benefit of eternal salvation. And, though fear chiefly was the beginning of his wisdom, yet long practice of virtue will ripen into an habit; and a settled habit will give him a relish for acts of virtue; till at last he *tastes and sees how gracious the Lord is*, who has abridged him of no pleasure, but what a discreet and loving father would withhold from his only son; and enjoined him no duty, but what is essential to, and interwoven with, his happiness. He will at last love to serve him, whose service he experiences to be perfect freedom. For good men go on from strength to strength, without confining themselves to any determined proportion of goodness, beyond which they are to proceed no farther.

To a considerate mind, that is all har-

mony within, that is in perfect good-humour with every thing about it; the Deity must appear like what he is, in perfect beauty; all-loving, and all-lovely, without any forbidding and frightening appearances; just as a deep stream, when clear and unruffled by any storm, represents the sun and firmament in a gentler and milder lustre; far more beautiful itself, by reflecting the beauties of heaven. Whatever uncomfortable notices we entertain of God, they are either the just forebodings of a mind disturbed with guilt, or the gloomy imagery of a fancy deeply tinged with melancholy. A vigorous progress in virtue will remove that horrible dread of the Deity, which sometimes overwhelms the minds of the guilty.

To conclude:

Do we act in concert with that Being, whose tender mercy is over all his works, by shewing mercy, as far as we can, in all ours?

Do we conscientiously endeavour to discharge all the duties he has enjoined us, without reluctance; and to submit to all his dispensations, without murmuring?

Do we address ourselves to him with that holy fear, which awes the turbulent passions into composure; but does not depress the spirit, or beget an abject and unmanly way of thinking?

Do we who look (or ought to look) up to him with reverence, as the great Judge and Lawgiver of the universe, chiefly delight to consider him under the endearing characters of a Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Benefactor?

Do we, before we compose ourselves to sleep, recommend ourselves to his almighty care, *who neither slumbers nor sleeps*? Do we, as soon as we rise, recommend ourselves to his superintendency, *who maketh his sun to rise upon the just and unjust*; humbly desiring, that, as that sun dispels the darkness and unwholesome vapours of the night; so he, the great *Sun of righteousness*, who *arise with healing in his wings*, would drive from us all evil; all evil, whether of mind, body, or estate?

Do we commit all our concerns in general to his providence, and fatherly goodness; and, upon every extraordinary emergency, make a more particular application to him for his direction, *who never faileth them that seek him*?

If we do, these undoubtedly are the only genuine tests, and significant expressions, of an undissembled love to God : and they will procure for us the blessed effects of that infinite love, which being *stronger than death*, disarmed death of its sting, and the grave of its victory.

SERMON XI.

On the Foundation of Morality.

[Preached before the University of Oxford.]

COLOSSIANS, iii. 23.

Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.

THESE words, though addressed by St. Paul to servants, contain matter of advice to all Christians, as *knowing, that whatever good any man doth, the same he shall receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.* We are commanded to *set God before us*; to *be holy, because he is holy*; and therefore, *whatsoever we do, we are to do it as to him*, who can discern each inward grace of the soul through the veil of modesty, and see each hidden vice through the mask of hypocrisy. I shall therefore make it my business, in what follows,

I. To prove that a regard to the Deity is the foundation of morality :

II. To inquire into the characters and motives of those, who, though strangers to piety and devotion, yet pretend to be animated with the most exalted sentiments of probity, generosity, and benevolence.

I. I am to prove that a regard to the Deity is the foundation of morality.

There can be no virtue in actions materially good, actions which we chanced, but did not mean to do. No; to stamp the sacred character of virtue upon our performances, the intention of the agent must be taken into the account. It is this inward principle, that must make our services grateful to the Deity; as it is the presumption of this, that makes them so to our fellow-creatures. Thus it is the presumed intention of the giver, which chiefly recommends the gift. Silver and gold some may have little or none; but whatever they take in hand, they

turn into gold: they beautify whatever they do, by a frank, ingenuous, and hearty manner of doing it. Man, however, can only judge of us from our outward actions and demeanour; and, as long as we are artful enough to save appearances, we are no farther accountable to him: He alone can effectually bind and oblige the heart, from which all goodness flows, who is alone the great searcher and discernor of our hearts.

Virtue is the observance of some law, as vice is the transgression of it: but there can be no laws at all without some lawgiver; and there can be no laws, which shall oblige us to cultivate inward merit and virtue (the only genuine merit) without a sacred regard to that lawgiver, to whom our inward virtue is only cognisable.

We are no further moral beings, than we are accountable beings. But to whom or what are we accountable? Not certainly to absolute fitnesses, the loveliness and beauty of virtue. To be accountable, implies that we are accountable to some superior; which superior can only be God, or a divine legislator: for if we leave a God out of the scheme, human legislators can never reach the conscience, which is a principle discernible only by him, from whom no secrets are hid. Thus a conscientious performance of good actions, in the last resort, in the last step of the scale, terminates in him, who is the dispenser of all blessings, the centre of all happiness, and therefore the object of all duty. And all the moral virtues are only so many cyphers, which may make an ample shew, yet are but so many empty unavailing nothings; unless the Deity be placed as the principal figure at the head of them, from whom they derive their weight, force, and significance.

If it be objected, that, though we were not accountable to the Deity, yet still we are obliged to cultivate virtue out of a regard to ourselves, to the ease, tranquillity, and satisfaction of our own minds: I answer, that if we could oblige ourselves, then we, who impose the obligation on ourselves, must have an equal power to take it off, or dispense with it, whenever we please: that they who pursue virtue for the peace and tranquillity of mind of which it is productive, will be obliged to deviate from it and forsake it,

it, whenever they apprehend that an inflexible adherence to the rules of it will bring upon them any great and lasting inconvenience, hardship, and misery. Virtue is nothing, but a rational conduct under the circumstances in which we are placed. But what would be highly rational, and consequently virtue upon the supposition of a future state, would be madness, and consequently not virtue, if that were left out of the account. Thus to die for the good of one's country, is a beautiful and noble instance of virtue; but it would be the height of enthusiasm in him, who harbours no fears, cherishes no hopes, and entertains no belief, of a future state, to part with his final happiness, his all, for nothing in reversion.

The understanding may discern, just as it does any other speculative truth, a natural fitness or unfitness in things, *i. e.* that some things have a tendency to promote, and others to obstruct the public happiness. But to influence the will, which is the seat of morality; to engage it to practise what is for the good of the whole, to bring things home to our bosom; a regard for that being, who is mighty to save, and able to destroy, must be the governing principle. For, though the understanding cannot but see the natural and essential differences of things, yet all morality implies choice: and nothing can make what is naturally fit or productive of public happiness, the object of our steady choice (at least in all cases), but the will of that being who only can make the love of ourselves, and the love of the public, to coincide without any interference. We must carefully distinguish between speculative abstract truths, and moral or practical truths. The former may be independent on the will of our Creator; but the latter (*viz.* truths reducible to practice) must be founded on a sense of duty to him, who alone can enforce the observance of them. For nothing can oblige us, but a view to our own happiness. Now, all our happiness depends upon God. He therefore alone can lay an effectual obligation upon us, who alone can make our happiness or misery commensurate to the extent of our being.

We have had a world of popular harangues upon the abstract beauty and intrinsic valuableness of virtue. Now, there

is no such thing as valuableness or worth distinct from usefulness; nothing being valuable any farther than it is useful. For what is a thing valuable for, that is of no use? And nothing is any farther valuable to any man than as it promotes his happiness. For what will neither give him pleasure nor pain, he must be entirely unaffected by; and what he is entirely unaffected by, to that he must be indifferent. And, after all our specious refinements, virtue must be built upon interest, our interest upon the whole. Nay, the more we endeavour to abstract from self, the more self will return: for the more we set apart all selfish views, the greater will be our self-complacency, or the more we shall be pleased with ourselves. There are two kinds of pleasure, the one arising from pleasing sensations, the other from delightful reflections on our conduct. He who denies himself the former (which are the coarser) gratifications, is often overpaid by the latter, but much more elegant enjoyments.

I know it will be objected, that virtue may be still disinterested: for though the pleasure arising from agreeable reflections may be the consequence of a virtuous course of life, yet it is not the cause of it: which is a moral instinctive sense, whereby we love what is good, and abhor what is evil, antecedently to any act of the understanding, or reflection upon the consequences of our actions. Now, supposing the genuineness of this moral sense or instinct, which several excellent writers have disputed; supposing, what is most unreasonable to suppose, that we need not apprehend or understand a thing to be lovely before we love it as such; that we need not judge a thing to be hateful, previously to our hatred of it; supposing our love of virtue and hatred of vice to be originally blind propensions and occult qualities: yet a virtue or goodness, which proceeds wholly and solely from this moral sense or instinct, is not our virtue or goodness; but that of our Creator, who has implanted this instinct. To make it, in any degree, ours, we must improve upon the moral sense, we must cultivate, cherish, and ripen it: we must not impair, weaken, and extinguish, but quicken and stir up this gift of God that is supposed to be in us. And then the question will return, what obligation we are under to do so. And

no other can be assigned, but the pleasure that is immediately consequent to it, or the endless happiness of the next world; so that, even upon this supposition, virtue, as far as it is ours, that is, as far as it is virtue, must be resolved into the interested scheme. He who observes the rules of morality for the sake of temporal pleasures, will never perform any act of duty that is highly distasteful to him, or forego any vice that is pleasant and palatable. The only sure ground-work of morality is therefore the prospect of heavenly bliss.

But farther, if we closely attend to the operations of our mind, and carefully observe what passeth within us, at that very instant, when we are doing a charitable or friendly office; I am apt to think we should find, that the pleasure which results from it, arises either from a sense, that what we are doing, may procure us the approbation of men; or it proceeds from a sense of having done our duty, and recommended ourselves to the favour of the Deity. Our benevolence, as far as it is owing to the former, is not virtue, but a desire of fame and distinction; as far as it is owing to the latter, it is virtue, but virtue founded upon the love of God. Joy, undoubtedly, like the light of the sun, never rebounds so strongly back again upon ourselves, as when it comes reflected to us from other objects. The grosser pleasures soon flatten upon the sense, and grow insipid to a well-turned mind: but then we feel the most exquisite and delicate, as well as most lasting, touches of pleasure, when we communicate it, in any great degree, to those about us. Yet that pleasure which is annexed to any generous and worthy deed, may be compared to its opposite, viz. that remorse, which is consequent to wickedness. And it may be questioned, whether we should have any (or at least any permanent) remorse, after having committed an ill action; if we were sure we could fence off all ill consequences, and neither be exposed to the scorn and hatred of the world, nor draw upon ourselves the divine vengeance. Just so it may admit of a dispute, whether the pleasure we are speaking of would not vanish, if we apprehended, that neither mankind would commend and esteem us, nor the Deity reward us for our goodness. It must be owned, that the succession of

our thoughts is sometimes very quick, and the transition from one to another very sudden: the sensations of pleasure are generally confused; and the more exquisite any pleasure is, the more confused and indistinct our thoughts are at that time. And I would desire those who frequently do good actions, minutely and curiously to observe, whether there does not accompany them some confused and transient glance of thought, which will soon be lost and escape their notice, if inattentive; that they act under the eye and inspection of the Deity, who, as he is every where present, cannot but see what they do; and, as he is infinitely good, cannot but behold it with pleasure: or whether the goodness of their actions, is not allayed by some sinister motives of vain-glory. But supposing the pleasure arises from neither of these considerations; yet it can only, as I observed before, induce us to go on in the paths of virtue when they are smooth and even; if other motives are set aside, we may deviate from them, when they are rugged, steep, and arduous.

It is in vain to attempt, as some have done, to build morality on the ruins of religion, and to propose a scheme of it independent on future rewards and punishments, with nothing to support it, but absolute fitnesses and a taste for intellectual beauty, comeliness, and proportion. For morality being designed for the practice of all mankind, must be built upon such notions as lie level to the capacities of men in general, and founded upon such motives as may affect all mankind: and those motives which address themselves to our hopes and fears, the two great springs which actuate human nature, effectually do this: but high-flown theories about the disinterested loveliness of virtue are calculated only for some few select spirits, if for them. Exalted speculations of too fine a thread and texture, are like very costly ornaments and very expensive delicacies; every man cannot command them, and, God be thanked, no man's necessities require them: plain common useful notions are like our daily bread and nourishment, all stand in need of them, and all may procure them with a moderate share of labour and application.

Let us, however, proceed to shew, what effect it is likely these fine notions would have, first, upon men of speculation;

tion; and, secondly, upon men of the world. As to the first,

It is much easier to conceive a thousand beautiful thoughts concerning virtue in our closet, than to put one of them in practice: because thoughts, thoughts beautiful in speculation, are the work of the imagination, which is as much delighted with a lovely idea, as the eye is with a lovely object: but when we would proceed from theory to practice, we must combat the selfish passions; we must get the better of our indolence and love of ease, which is apt to grow upon speculative men. He whose reigning pleasure it is to speculate and think beautifully, will not therefore act beautifully: because action calls him off from his favourite pleasure, that of speculation: he will be averse to action, at least all difficult action: which aversion nothing can conquer, but much stronger and more forcible motives, than those arising from the loveliness of virtue. And hence, I suppose, it comes to pass, that those who have entertained the world and themselves with these lofty notions, have not been very remarkable for the practice of the active virtues. A certain elegance of thinking may have restrained them from the grosser vices of abandoned sensuality and intemperance, and they may have observed the rules of morality, as far as it was pleasant and agreeable to them; but they have never served their country, their neighbours, or themselves, at the expence of their beloved ease and repose. There seems to be a certain *vis inertia* in souls, as well as in bodies, by which they resist all change or alteration of the state in which they are: and it is a matter of as much difficulty to rouse the speculative from their indolence, as it is to check the career of the sensual, the worldly, and the ambitious: just as it requires as much force and impressed energy to move a body at rest, as it does to stop a body in motion.

Pass we on from the men of speculation to the men of the world. Let virtue *charm never so wisely*, they will *refuse to hear the voice of the charmer*. The figure of life, and the polite and elegant enjoyments of it, are to them, what intellectual order, harmony, and beauty, are to the speculative. Let the studious rear their visionary fabrics in the air; they think it a much more substantial pleasure to erect

grand and magnificent structures on solid ground. Discourse to them, as long as you please, on the pleasure and comeliness of well-ordered affections, and how much better it is to govern the passions, than to let them have the ascendant. They will answer, that they can, with a full command over themselves, go on in a calm sedate pursuit of wealth and honour: they can, as several others have done before them, without any discomposure of mind, drain and impoverish the common current of good, to fill their own private canals. They scorn, as much as you can, to plunge into the lowest sink of vice; what they propose, is a studied luxury and a refinement in pleasure, to enjoy the present criminal gratifications in such a manner, as not to deaden by any excess their relish for the future. The ideal excellency of virtue they look upon as a painted flame, which may delight the eye of the curious, but cannot dispense any active warmth and heat; the dream of idle people, that write in their closets, and the amusement of idle people, who read there: but if you can thoroughly convince them, that eternal misery will be the consequence of a life spent in pursuing forbidden pleasure, and amassing wealth by indirect means; that there is no salvation without repentance, and no repentance without refunding their ill-gotten wealth: such a consideration pressed home is like a mirror held close to the lips: if there be the least breath of spiritual life remaining in them, it will catch it and shew it; it will have some effect, if they be not utterly incorrigible.

We shall never follow virtue effectually, till we cleave to it with full purpose of heart, with the energy of a resolved will; we shall never cleave to it with the energy of a resolved will, with the full bent of our inclinations, till we are uneasy without it; we shall never be uneasy without it, till we look upon it as essential to our happiness, till we consider ourselves as undone without it for ever, but by it heirs of eternal happiness. He that is at ease, will never exert himself vigorously; but uneasiness is the great spur to action. To remove the pressure of uneasiness, a man will apply every engine; just as he would heave off any incumbent weight that pressed him down. Now, to make a man uneasy in the absence of virtue, and under

the dominion of vice, shall we set before him the fitness and loveliness of morality; motives that apply themselves either to pure abstract reason only, which is a cold sedentary principle, or to the calmer affections, which operate but faintly? Or shall we call in to our aid, religious considerations, the dread of eternal vengeance, and the hopes of endless felicity; considerations, which touch upon every thing that is most dear and valuable to us, and call forth the workings of self-love and the desire of happiness, the first great wheel of the soul, to which all the rest move in subordination? I do not believe that any person, from the creation to this time, has been reclaimed, by the strength of the former motives, from a habit of vice to that of virtue: but several have been in all ages reformed by the latter.

If the beauty of virtue has so little effect upon us in the calmer seasons of life, it has still much less in the hour of trial and in the day of adversity. What may beautify and embellish the soul in prosperity, will be of little service to invigorate and strengthen it under affliction; like those persons, who are the ornaments of peace, but are too tender to bear the rough hardships of war, or to stand the shock in the day of battle. An uneasy sensation or a clamorous appetite will be always too hard for a fine delightful reflection, because it will press rudely in, demand to be heard, and break off the sweet intercourse which we may be holding with some beloved idea. That delicate feeling within, by which we enjoy ourselves and discern the agreeableness of virtue, will give way to another feeling of a boisterous nature, that of pain for instance. Let us suppose the intrinsic worth and absolute loveliness of virtue, in itself, abstracting from all the beneficial consequences and happy effects of virtue, that is, abstracting from every thing lovely in virtue: (for virtue can be no farther lovely, than as it is a means to happiness); yet the loveliness of virtue cannot be a motive to all men at any time; for several have no manner of notion of it. Nor can it be a motive to any man at all times: it would have just as much influence upon a man in deep distress, as the beautiful prospect of the rainbow had upon the person, who after a shipwreck was just sinking into the deep. "All

"this," says he, "is mighty fine, but what is it to me, who am perishing irretrievably?" The love of virtue, without rewards either in hand or prospect, is like the love of beauty, exclusive of all other considerations. A lover may form fine luxuriant romantic scenes in his imagination; yet all that assemblage of soft, tender, delicate ideas, the product of a mind at ease, vanishes, as soon as poverty comes upon him *like an armed man*. Just so a man, at ease in his circumstances, or at leisure in his closet, may be transported with contemplating the goodness of virtue: yet the rude pressure of adversity will soon put to the rout those airy refined notions, owing to the enthusiasm of an over-heated fancy, not the suggestions of cool reason, which never separates the beauty of virtue from its usefulness, which is its only beauty. Nothing can support a man in the practice of his duty in the depths of affliction, but the consideration, that the Deity will join nothing as a duty, by which he shall be a loser or a sufferer upon the whole: that, however his happiness and his duty may be disjoined at present, yet the streams shall unite again, and flow forever in the same current. Whether do they act more rationally, who admire virtue as a fine piece of painting or statuary; or they, who pursue it as the source of solid everlasting happiness? They who delight in it, just as they do in a fine piece of painting or statuary, for its beauty, would part with it, when reduced to poverty, just as they would do with a fine piece of painting, to purchase the substantial conveniences of life. The principles of religion will support virtue and us, and be, like God, a *present help in trouble*: but all other principles, however entertaining at other times, will, like false friends, forsake us, when we have most need of them, in the day of adversity.

Though there may be a natural fitness or unfitness in actions, as they have a tendency to advance or hinder the public good antecedently to the will of God; yet their moral fitness must be founded on his will, as their only sure and solid basis: for morality supposes a determined rule of life and a fixed pursuit of natural fitnesses. Now, he who pursues what is naturally fit for the sake of the greatest good, eternal felicity, may act invariably, because

because he goes upon the strength of a motive which nothing can outweigh. But he who follows what is naturally fit for the sake of some temporal good, must change his measures, when a greater good, inconsistent with his pursuits, offers itself. The rule of right reason in him, who believes no other state, would be to procure all the advantages and pleasures he could in this : and so all the rules of what we now call virtue, would be quite inverted. It would be reasonable to break through any or all of them, to make life happy when we could ; and it would be reasonable to throw up life, when we could not : setting the will of the Deity aside, we should be so far from being under an obligation to live well, that we should not be obliged to live at all. Either we must say, that virtue is not universally obligatory at all times, and upon all emergencies ; not something fixed, invariable, and indispensable, but only occasional ; which is contrary to the very idea of virtue : or we must say, that we are obliged to practise virtue in all cases of extremity, though we shall be never the better for our uncomplying honesty, nay, though we be finally losers by it, which is contrary to common sense :—for we must found virtue upon the sanctions and will of the Deity, who alone can make it our interest to practise virtue in all cases, in the lowest ebb of fortune, as well as in an uninterrupted flow of prosperity.

I do not, however, place virtue upon arbitrary will ; for arbitrary will is changeable, and no consistent rule of action, which virtue implies, can take place upon so precarious a footing. No ; virtue must be fixed on the sure basis of God's immutable and necessary will. For it may be demonstrated, that the Creator necessarily and immutably wills the general happiness of the creation. And moral virtue is, to choose what is, in its genuine tendency, productive of the general happiness, in conformity to his will, his unchangeable will.

SERMON XII.

On the Characters of those who pretend to Morality without Religion.

[Preached before the University of Oxford.]

COLOSSIANS, iii. 23.

Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.

HAVING in a former discourse endeavoured, I. To ascertain the foundation of morality, and fix it on its proper basis, viz. a regard to the Deity ; I now proceed,

II. To inquire into the characters and motives of those, who, though strangers to piety and devotion, yet pretend to be animated with the most exalted sentiments of benevolence, humanity, and probity.

It is no easy matter to understand upon what principles they can act, who make pretensions to an exalted worth, but are unfortunately lost to all sentiments of piety. If they disbelieve a future state, then to think, that they shall shortly be, as if they never had been, that they must soon be swallowed up in annihilation, that bottomless gulph, where all distinctions are lost, as rivers in the ocean ; is enough to pall each exalted and noble thought, and to beget in them a fullness, sourness, and discontent. A fretfulness, and impatience, that will grow upon them, will make them, so far from *fulfilling the law by bearing one another's burdens*, that they will be incapable of bearing their own. They must despise themselves and their fellow-creatures as a set of insignificant reptiles, that are to crawl for a while upon the face of the earth, and then to mix with the common mass of things. And as they who expect no other life, ought to make the most of this, they must contract a narrow-spirited and illiberal cast of thought.

But if they believe a future state, how can they have any taste and relish for benevolence ; and yet have no love for that Being, who has endowed morality and benevolence with an exceeding and eternal reward ? On the other hand, what delightful perceptions must it give them to reflect, that at the same time that they are wishing, contriving, and promoting, the happiness

happiness of their fellow-creatures, they are fellow-workers with that great and good Being, who is able and willing to give them as great a happiness as their most unbounded good-will can wish, and far greater than their narrow understanding can conceive? How must their hearts burn within them, who have so fervent a zeal for charity, to find, that this *charity shall never fail*; that these short-lived instances of friendship and good-will, which we shew to one another here, will be succeeded by an uninterrupted intercourse of mutual endearments for ever and ever? And what will most heighten their humanity, will be, to consider, that we shall all be partakers of the same common happiness from him, with whom is the *fulneſs of joy*, and from whom continual *rivers of pleasures* are ever streaming. It is then absurd to pretend a love for benevolence, and yet to be regardless of the most benevolent Being that is. And it is likewise absurd to pretend to love him, without a serious examination into his will, never dismissing what bears that venerable stamp, without a fair and impartial hearing of the evidences for the truth of it. For on whomsoever the world may bestow the title of moral men, yet an indifferent carelessness, and a wilful neglect to examine into his will and pleasure, is no part of morality. Nay, his will, whose pleasure we must either do, or whose displeasure we must unavoidably suffer, ought to be the uppermost consideration of every man. Can he deserve the name of a good man, who does not shew the least regard to that Being, to whom he owes every thing: the Deity being the fountain-head even of those blessings, which are conveyed to him by his fellow-creatures, as through so many channels?

But is it not, you will say, true in fact, that there are several of strict probity, generosity, and worth, without the least tincture of piety? To which I answer, several have from their infancy associated the ideas of happiness and esteem, of misery and disgrace. This makes them decline those actions which may entail infamy and disgrace upon them; and pursue those which may beget an esteem for them; esteem being to them an essential ingredient of happiness. They have been taught to set an high value upon themselves; which high value of themselves is always, more or less, accompanied by a suspicion or mistrust, that they over-value

themselves. For which reason they are impatient to have the favourable verdict, which they pass upon themselves, seconded and confirmed by the approbation of others, and unwilling to do any thing that may lessen them in the opinion of their fellow-creatures. It is then the desire of fame, not the love of virtue, which is their incentive to good actions. And if we look abroad into the world, we find it thus in fact. Persons of this stamp will scorn to do a little thing through the abhorrence of any thing that may make them cheap and contemptible in the eye of the world: but they will not scruple to commit a sin, upon which the fashionable world has stamped a credit, and given a sanction to. A person who is ungrateful, much more, ungrateful to his sovereign Benefactor, must be void of every thing which is great, glorious, and beautiful in the soul. He may indeed be actuated by the love of applause, by caprice, by the prevailing mode and fashion of the age in which he lives; but his mind is too narrow, contracted, and ungenerous, to be swayed by any fixed and determined principle of goodness.

He who in a public sphere seems to have the good of his country much at heart, superior to all interested views; in private life blasts the honour, wounds the peace, of a deserving family, and does that which he would think so unreasonable, as to warrant the keenest resentments, if he were the party injured. You wonder at this motley mixture in his character. But why should you expect a consistency of life and manners from him, who has no religious, and therefore no consistent, principle to act upon? The case is this: what he acts in a public sphere, he acts not as a duty incumbent on him, but as it falls in with his reigning passion, his fondness for popularity, and a desire to be thought of by others, as highly as he thinks of himself. In private life, when the eye of the world is no more upon him, his selfish and sordid passions operate with their full force, and draw him off from that goodness which he never practised for substantial reasons: he hoped, that what he did in privacy, would escape the public notice: but if it took air, the world, the higher part of the world, has dignified these vices with the specious name of gallantry, given a countenance to them, and by the commonness of them, lessened the popular odium against them.

I answer further, that there is a distinction to be made between a complexional benevolence, and a rational humanity. The former depends upon a finer texture of the body, a brisker circulation of the blood, and flow of the animal spirits; and is rather an happiness than a virtue. And it is observable, that this benevolence decays in some people, as they advance in years: those who were open to every social and humane pleasure, sometimes grow contracted in old age, and centre every thing in themselves; like rivers freezing in winter, that before dispensed plenty and fruitfulness all around. The truth of the matter is: it was only an occasional complacency, operating by fits and starts, not deeply rooted in the soul, but founded on the temper and mechanism of the body; and therefore ceased of course, when that mechanism was altered.

The true genuine uniform benevolence which will stand the test, must be seated in the soul, and founded upon rational principles: and the question is, whether there can be such a rational benevolence, which is always the same, without any regard to that Being, who is the *same yesterday, to-day, and for ever*. Now, benevolence implies a disposition to part with some advantages, which we enjoy, in order to promote the happiness of our fellow-creatures. And in so doing, the man who is actuated by a principle of piety, acts very rationally: what he *gives unto the poor, he lends unto the Lord, who will repay him again*. But he who foregoes his own enjoyments for the sake of another, without any prospect of a recompense, must love his neighbour better than himself, contrary to the dictates of cool unbiassed reason. Though therefore there may be a constitutional or natural generosity without any love of or regard for the Deity; yet there can be no such thing as a rational, steady, and manly benevolence, without it. For worldly pleasure, honour, or convenience, can be his only rational aim, whose views are terminated by this world.

There is a fashion in virtues, as well as in vices. Now, charity has the good luck to be in fashion at present: and it happens very fortunately, that an age and nation which abound in sin and vices of all kinds, should be distinguished by a virtue, which *covers a multitude of*

sins. There have been, I know, some who, without any appearances of piety, have expended large sums of money in works of charity. Now, not to examine whether this were owing to a kindly impulse of nature, or to the desire of popularity and applause; let it be observed, that whatever they do by their charity, they undo by the influences of a bad example. When persons in low life observe those who move in an higher orb, shewing an open neglect of the Deity, they are too apt to copy after them, and then, having no fear of God before their eyes, give a loose to those vices, which impoverish them, and plunge them into miseries of all kinds. And thus irreligious men of rank and figure introduce those very miseries by their influence, which they can only relieve in part by their benevolence. Nay, this very benevolence, a glaring popular virtue, makes their example more dangerous, than if they were consummately wicked: just as, according to the Mosaic law, a man that was leprous only in part, was more to be avoided, than he whose body was entirely overspread with the leprosy. For a man desperately wicked raises in us an abhorrence, and is a kind of antidote to vice: but when good as well as bad ingredients enter into the composition of the same man; it is to be feared, that his shining qualities, and especially so shining an one as humanity, will give a lustre to his vices, and recommend them to our imitation. All the good which he can do, will not counterbalance the ill consequences of an example tending to give disadvantageous impressions of religion, and to discountenance that public and reverential awe of the Deity, which is the surest guard of virtue and the strongest restraint from vice. Imitation is confessedly a strong principle of action, and the imitation of the richer to the lower sort. Therefore he who is acted by a consistent rational principle of benevolence, will, for the same reason that he is benevolent, be, or at least appear to be, devout; which will be the greatest instance of his benevolence: as his good example may prevent those vices, and that distress, the consequence of those vices, which an abandoned profaneness and ungodliness never fails to produce.

Many of those who are void of religious principles, make politeness, which should be only the ornament of their behaviour,

behaviour, the sole rule of their actions. Morality has nothing to do in the case (whatever pretensions they may make to it), which teaches men not to polish over their behaviour, but to be intrinsically good; not to disguise their passions, but to get the better of them. The passion, for instance, of malice is equally strong in some men of a refined education, as in those who have wanted that advantage: the only difference is, the former hate with a well-bred malice and a courtly animosity; whereas the hatred of the latter is more frank and undissembled: it discharges itself, which that of the former never does, in unseemly, scurrilous, and outrageous language. For the clothing of men's thoughts differs, just as the clothing of their bodies does, according to their different ranks: the vulgar clothe their thoughts, just as they do their persons, in the most homely and coarse attire; whereas men of condition clothe theirs, which are often as corrupt as those of the former, in a genteeler dress and more delicate apparel. Vice is the same in both: in the one, it is an open sepulchre, foul, noisome, and unfightly: in the other, it is a sepulchre whitened over and beautified: what is offensive, is carefully removed out of sight, and nothing appears, whatever may be beneath, but what conveys genteel and polite ideas. This is all those persons mean, if they have any settled meaning (as far as one can judge from their practice), who have no regard for Christianity, but yet are advocates for the beauty of virtue. It is to practise some virtues, or rather to put on the appearances of some virtues, such as generosity, courage, &c. because they are becoming, genteel, and reputable, give them a considerable figure, and bespeak an elevation of mind answerable to their dignity: in the mean time, they leave others undone, such as humility, faith, meekness, and abstinence; though as much founded upon reason, as any other virtues; merely because they have the misfortune to be unfashionable. They do not so much detest vice, properly speaking, as what is low, vulgar, and unbecoming in each vice, as I observed before in that of malice, and might give many more instances. Decency is the idol which ingrosses all their homage, exclusive of true genuine inward virtue.

And if that be the case, they may be said to do just as the Heathens did, who sacrificed to the graces, but did not serve the God of heaven and earth. They do not abstain from sin as such, but from sin under such modifications, as make it shocking and inconsistent with fine manners.

After all, I will not deny, that *the head of man is deceitful, who can know it?* It mistakes mere notions for realities, as some talk and write about chance, fortune, and necessity, as if they had an actual existence. It may sometimes imagine, what is a mere notional beauty of virtue, viz. a beauty distinct from its advantages, to be something real and substantial. It may form a fine idea, and then fall in love with its own creation. For enthusiasm does not confine itself to religion, it extends itself to virtue and to every thing else. Our notions generally take a tincture from our temper. And men whose glowing and romantic imagination makes plain sense flat and tasteless to them, will disrelish such a morality as the Christian, which is founded on plain sober sense: they must image to themselves something rapturous and ecstatic: and when they meet with no object of this kind in the nature of things, they strike out one for themselves by the heat of a prolific fancy. Rapt up into the airy regions of visions and chimeras, where they walk in a vain shew and please themselves in vain, they look down with disdain upon meaner mortals of a cooler turn, who follow unaffected virtue upon solid ground. Sanguine men are seldom content with things as they are: to take a liking to them, they must imagine beauties, which they have not. And thus some may, for ought I know, have gone beyond the verge of cool reason, and worked themselves up into an enthusiastic ardour for virtue, by the help of I know not what visionary and disinterested charms, which they have supposed it to have, without any view to its real excellencies, the advantages it brings here and hereafter. The mystery of the affair lies here. They feel a warmth of soul, when they have been long contemplating the fair idea of virtue: now they imagine, that it is the beauty of virtue, all lovely in itself, which warms them; and that that must be something real, not visionary, which can impart a real warmth: whereas

whereas there is nothing real, but the ferment and glow of the imagination, which always takes fire by dwelling very long upon any object. Instances, however, of this lovely frenzy are very rare: the gross of our species are not susceptible of so fine an enthusiasm.

The generality of men, who pretend to morality independently of religion (except those in whom the original goodness of their nature gets the better of the badness of their principles), are such as have studied and practised the art of being easy and agreeable, without incommoding themselves, or denying themselves any pleasure within bounds. The difference between the vulgar and them consists in this: that the former, like marble in the block, retain a native ruggedness; whereas the latter have an equally impenetrable, but a more smooth and polished hardness of heart. Cheap favours, an insignificant easiness of good-manners, and all the outside of benevolence, you may expect from them: but do not expect from them any solid and material services; do not expect, that any thing you can say should touch their hearts, or that they will do any thing which comes warm from thence. Their pretended benevolence is somewhat like the religion of the Pharisees, who were insipidly exact, and frivolously punctual in little unconcerning niceties, such as *tithing mint, anise, and cummin*, but neglected the *weightier matters of the law, such as judgment, mercy, and truth*: and to both may be applied our Saviour's saying, *These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone*. Benevolence, any further than it is constitutional, in most of those who disclaim all piety and devotion, is a fine sounding word, of which we hear a great deal in their conversation, but see little or nothing in their practice. Is there a man who, though a stranger to piety, yet, without being misled by caprice or ostentation, goes on in a regular uniform habitual practice of doing good; who, raised above the common wants of life, feels the miseries of his fellow-creatures with almost as much sensibility, as if he knew by experience what it was to want; and believes them with all the bounty of one, who is not afraid to want himself? Such a man would not be far from the kingdom of *heaven*. But I am afraid,

such a character is, for the most part, visionary and romantic. We run from one extreme to another: and benevolence without piety, to which it is closely allied, is commonly as much mere pretence and hypocrisy, as piety without benevolence was during the time of the grand rebellion. Then men were for giving *glory to God*, without shewing *good-will to men*, or promoting *peace upon earth*: and, since that time, some have set up a principle of morality and good-will to man, exclusive of all devotion and homage to the Deity. Both are inseparably united; and what God and reason have joined together, let not man put asunder. But folly, like matter, is continually shifting the scene, and subsisting under different modifications. It is the fate of some people to be governed by a set of words without any determinate meaning annexed to them. *Seeking the Lord*, when men were ravaging the nation, was not more a cant term and mere jargon, than the agreeable soft sound of benevolence is, generally speaking, at present, without that, which must be the basis of it, an affectionate love of God. A man may indeed do good occasionally without any principle, the very brutes doing several acts that are materially good: but to be habitually good, to be all of a piece, and consistent throughout, there must be a fixed principle of goodness woven into the soul. And he that will not do good to his fellow-creatures for the sake of God, who created him, cannot, consistently with reason, be obliged to do it upon other motives. To lessen therefore our love of God, is to weaken our love of mankind. That God would place to his own account, whatever was done for his sake to our distressed brethren, is a motive to do good as much superior to all others, as he himself is to all other beings.

An excellent Grecian historian, who lived before those principles of irreligion had gotten footing in Rome, to which he ascribes the ruin of his own country, has an observation very apposite to my present purpose. I shall beg leave to transcribe it, as I find it translated by a very eminent writer.

"See now the difference" [*i. e.* between a strict observance of religion and a disregard to it]. "In Greece, he that is intrusted with the public mo-
"ney,"

“ney,” (to pass by other matters),
 “though it be but of a single talent, and
 “though he gives a tenfold security,
 “cannot be brought to discharge his
 “engagements: while among the Ro-
 “mans the mere religion of an oath
 “keeps those, who in the public ad-
 “ministration, or in foreign nego-
 “ciations, have vast sums of money
 “passing through their hand, from vio-
 “lating their honour and uprightness.
 “And whereas in other places” (where
 irreligion prevails) “it is rare to find
 “a man who keeps his hands clean; on
 “the contrary, among the Romans, it is
 “as rare to find any offending in this
 “kind.”

Thus far this writer, from whose country those very irreligious notions were soon after introduced into Rome, which, in process of time, proved destructive to it too.

I shall close this discourse with the following remark, viz. That though a man should violate some, or even all, the social duties, yet as long as a regard to the Deity was not quite extinct in him, there would be still some hold to be taken, and some faint hopes of reclaiming him. The root of virtue (for *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*) is still in the ground; and it may yet put forth again, though several of the considerable branches have been maimed and lopped off: but when a reverential awe of his Maker is quite worn out and defaced, then indeed the *axe is laid unto the root of the tree*: the very foundation, upon which the hopes of amendment could be built, is destroyed: his recovery is desperate, and his ruin sealed: there is nothing left to curb him from vice, and bring him back again to the practice of virtue.

S E R M O N XIII.

The Notion of Pride stated, and the Pretensions to it examined.

ROMANS, xii. 3.

Not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly.

IT is a common observation, that however forward men may be to repine at the unequal portion which God has

allotted them of worldly blessings; yet they are generally well satisfied with their share of inward endowments: it being as hard to meet with a person who humbly thinks he has too little sense and merit, as it is to find one who fancies he has too great riches and honours.

What makes men uneasy in their circumstances, is, that they are continually setting to view, the bright side of themselves, and the dark side of their condition in life; the first to find out their own grievances, and the last to discern their own faults and follies. Whereas, if they took a contrary method, they would perceive, that God had been kinder to the worst of men, than the very best of men could deserve.

Self-love is a passion interwoven in our frame and constitution; and if it be not kept under due regulation, self-conceit will be the necessary effect of it. For since we are apt to believe what we wish to be true, is it a wonder if we overrate those perfections which we have; and imagine ourselves possessed of those which we have no title to?

In our youth, pleasure has often the ascendant; in the middle of our age, ambition; and avarice brings up the rear at the close of life. But this vice, of which I am speaking, attends too many of us from the cradle to the grave: we being equally vain, whether we pursue pleasure, honour, or wealth: the master passion of the soul is the same, though its servants are often changed according to the different stages of life.

For this reason the apostle ushers in the words of my text with a peculiar emphasis and force. *For I say, according to the grace given unto me, to every one among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly.*

In which words St. Paul adviseth us, that instead of viewing ourselves in that engaging light which the servile flattery of others, or our own assuming vanity (our greatest flatterer of all) might place us in, we should endeavour to form a true estimate of our worth, or, in the words of the text, *think soberly.*

Among the many imputations which we are willing to fasten upon those whom we have an aversion to, that of pride is, I think, one of the most common. Now, if

we would examine the innermost recesses of the mind, I doubt we should often find, that our own pride is the cause why we tax others with it. Men, elate with the thoughts of their own sufficiency, are ever imagining that others are wanting in their regard to them, and therefore very apt to conclude, that pride must be the cause why they withhold from them that respect, which they have an unquestioned right to in their own opinion. Of this we have a pregnant instance in scripture: *You take too much upon you*, said Corah and his accomplices, when they themselves were taking too much upon them, and invading the province of Aaron. Hence it is, that their character seldom escapes the brand of vanity, who have the fortune to be possessed of those accomplishments, which would make their detractors vain.

But before we asperse others with this censure, let us consider what pride is, and correct our mistakes about the nature of it.

In the following discourse I shall therefore,

- I. State the notion of pride:
- II. Consider the unreasonableness of this vice.

I. Then, I am to state the notion of pride.

Our happiness, as well as knowledge, arises from sensation and reflection; and may be reduced to these two articles, viz. that of pleasing sensations, and that of agreeable thoughts. Now, as to a desire of indulging the former without check or control, are owing lust, drunkenness, and intemperance; so from a desire of indulging the latter beyond measure, pride takes its original. And it is very remarkable, that those who most deny themselves pleasing sensations, will be, except they are very much upon their guard, apt overmuch to indulge agreeable reflections upon themselves. In proportion as they resist the coarser self-indulgences, the more refined and spiritual vices will gain an easier entrance. Just as subtle and thin matter finds admittance and fills up the vacancy, where bodies of a grosser contexture cannot penetrate. Pride springs from a partial view of ourselves, a view of the bright side of ourselves, without balancing against it our numerous imperfections

and defects; how little good we can perform without the grace of God, and how little we actually do perform even with it. It does not consist in the bare consciousness that we have some accomplishments, as for instance good sense, beauty, great abilities; but in that exultation of mind, which is consequent upon that consciousness, unallayed by any self-dissatisfaction arising from a survey of our sins and frailties. If our virtues and perfections (supposing them our own acquisitions) were unallayed; then an unallayed self-complacency might justly be the result of a knowledge of them: but as human excellencies will have a mixture of human weaknesses, our self-complacency ought to be moderated in proportion to our faults and imperfections. The difference between humility and pride consists in this, that the humble man, whatever talents he is possessed of, considers them as so many trusts reposed in him by God, which are so far from raising his pride, that they excite his caution; as knowing that to *whom much is given, of him much will be required*: whereas the proud values himself as if he were not only the subject, but the author of those good qualities; and so makes an idol of himself, instead of adoring and thanking God for them. The proud man is dazzled with the lustre of his own excellencies: whereas the humble man, though not insensible of particular endowments, yet thinks meanly of himself absolutely and upon the whole; and begs that God would not weigh his merits, but pardon his offences.

A total self-loathing, however, would be as great a fault, as a clear and unmixed self-liking: it would deaden all the powers of the soul, and sink it into a state of inaction. There is a medium between a just sense of our abilities, and an exorbitant opinion of them. The former is of admirable service to mankind, when qualified with a due proportion of discretion and modesty. A just consciousness of those talents with which God has intrusted us, will give life and spirit to our undertakings, and be a powerful motive to those actions, which may make us truly glorious: modesty and discretion will be a bar to those attempts, which being above our sphere may make us ridiculous. Thus do these two act in concert; and while the former prompts

us to display ourselves, the latter prevents us from exposing ourselves. The flame will aspire upwards; but it will be with trembling.

It is a false humility to have low derogatory thoughts of human nature in general, as if it were entirely and essentially corrupt, without any mixture of goodness: true humility chiefly teacheth us to have low notions of those personal differences, which distinguish one man from another. Man ought to reverence himself, as a being capable of knowledge, virtue, and everlasting happiness: but then he becomes blameable, when he is elate upon the account of accidental differences; if, for instance, being a man of a large compass of thought and deep penetration, he shall despise another, because he is of a duller apprehension, or perhaps an idiot. For it is to be considered, that the soul is of the same kind in both, equally great as to all essential qualities in the one as in the other: and the only superiority he has, consists perhaps in a finer contexture of the brain, or a livelier flow of the animal spirits: which is plain from this, that an accident or a disease shall reduce a man of the most distinguished sense to the condition of a natural. And it would be just as reasonable to despise a man, because he could not work as well as we with wretched instruments, as to condemn a man, because he cannot reason as well with a body inconveniently formed for thinking; the body being an instrument to the soul in thinking. The soul of one man is lodged as it were in a commodious lightsome mansion, where it can command a spacious prospect, and take in variety of objects; and the soul of another may be pent up as it were in a dark dungeon, where there are few or no inlets of knowledge. But when this earthly tabernacle shall be dissolved, and the mind enlarged, they will both of them be upon an equal foot: when that knowledge which is *in part shall be done away*, and that which is perfect is come; a man of the dullest apprehension shall perhaps be in a moment wiser than the greatest scholar, after a life laid out in painful researches, can be here. So little reason is there to lay great stress upon those accidental differences which distinguish one man from another; at the same time that it is ingratitude to God, as well as false

humility, to deprecate human nature in general.

Pride then is, as the text expresseth it, the thinking too highly of ourselves. It is an over-weening conceit of our dignity, founded upon some real or imaginary superiority to our neighbours: which, when it expresseth itself in an imperious and overbearing carriage, and a commanding mien, is called *haughtiness*; and is generally the fault of a narrow education: whereas men of an enlarged conversation give into a more delicate pride, which can never enjoy itself, but when it is so artful, as to conceal itself under the mask of humility.

The generality of mankind consider only the surface of their actions, without ever sounding the depths of their heart, and tracing the inward workings of the soul. Indeed we cannot but be sensible of the violent emotions and agitations of any passion; but the stiller and gentler movements oft escape our notice.

Thus when pride becomes so enormous, as, in the words of a judicious writer *, "to make men use their servants as if they were brutes, their inferiors as servants, and their equals as inferiors;" men must be blind to overlook this vice in others, or even in themselves. But when it conceals itself under studied disguises and refinements, it will, except we are very attentive, elude our observation. To give some instances. A person is perhaps very liberal: but while he does not examine the principle of his liberality, he shall not perceive, that pride is often the source of it, that he only makes an exchange of money for glory, and dispenses his favours, because he values the vanity of giving, more than the thing which he gives. Another mistakes the affability of the gentleman, or man of the world, for the humility of the Christian. Whereas he ought to consider, that we oft beat down those vices which are flagrant and glaring, by others which are secret and out of sight. Thus we often get the better of intemperance, not by a virtuous principle, but merely by a passionate fondness for long life, by the fear of death, or by avarice. Thus we often sacrifice our outward pride to an inward one. We keep in our insolence, because a supercilious and contemptuous

* Hooker's works, p. 520.

treatment of others would only make us contemptible. But affability and a complacency of behaviour opens us a passage to the hearts of men, and gains us an advantageous situation in their minds. It may be a more artful manner to engage that respect which we seem to decline. Men of this turn may be very affable, not to do honour to others, but as they take affability to be an honour to themselves.

It has been observed, I suppose, by way of compliment to the present age, that one vice at least, viz. that of hypocrisy, seems to be banished from among us: but, alas! unless we could divest human nature of its weaknesses, no vice will ever be quite extinct, though it may appear under another form. Thus a religious hypocrisy seems indeed, in some measure, to be no more; but in the room of it there has started up a genteel and polite hypocrisy, a certain decency of behaviour, which, by putting on the appearances of every virtue, prevents the reality of any. What is foul and loathsome in each vice, men must keep out of sight, unless they would be public nuisances: but then they only part with its outward deformity, without any amendment of the heart. Nay some, I believe, confound the ideas of politeness and morality. They mistake the aversion which they have in themselves to whatever is ill-bred, unseemly, and offensive in any sin, for a genuine love of goodness; they imagine that to be a virtue, which is only vice refined.

The more a man knows of the world, the more sensible he will be, that he must conceal the odious part of pride, unless he would be odious to himself. But then he may retire into himself, to cherish each favourable and delightful idea of his own worth, that soothes and flatters his vanity, shutting out all humbling and mortifying reflections, that, like so many plain-dealing friends, would put him out of humour with himself, by suggesting to him unwelcome, though necessary, truths: and yet this is the very essence of pride.

For humility consists in the inward frame and disposition of the mind, in a right judgment, in the main, of ourselves: it is when we ascribe the glory of our actions to God alone, who gives

us power to act; like polished vessels, which reflect back again the rays of light which they receive, instead of absorbing, imbibing, and detaining them: it is to have a deep sense that God created us out of nothing, and that sin reduceth us to a state worse than nothing without the mercies of God, and the merits of our Saviour.

Though there may be a sincerity without humility, yet a simplicity of manners is a necessary ingredient of it. For there is a difference between simplicity and sincerity; or, in other words, a man may be very sincere without any simplicity: he may not be ambitious to be thought what he is not; yet be too ostentatious of what he is: unable to wait till others discover, he is impatient to display his own perfections with all the advantages which art and address can give them: whereas simplicity is free from every alloy of vanity, or any thing of a shewish nature; it shines forth with natural and unstudied beauties, *is not puffed up, seeketh not its own*, the praise that is due to it; and its chief ornament is, that it does not affect any. And yet the true sublime of life, as well as of writing, consisteth in the simple. For noble actions, and noble qualities, like noble thoughts, support themselves; they have an inherent greatness, and native lustre, which needs not foreign pomp and borrowed ornaments. Nothing does them more harm than setting them off too much, and overcharging them with decorations.

To obviate mistakes, and to remove scruples, it will be necessary to observe, that pride is not merely to think favourably of ourselves: for then indeed pride, as some late authors have maintained, would be an universal vice; every body being, more or less, biassed in his own favour. But pride is to think so favourably of ourselves, as to exclude a modest diffidence of ourselves, and a salutary sense of the number of human frailties, the imperfection of our virtues, the malignity of our crimes, and our dependence on God for every thing good in us and for us. A man may think himself somewhat wiser and better than he is, who, notwithstanding, may have an humble or low opinion of himself upon the whole, as being far from thinking himself wise and good enough; far from

thinking that he standeth collected in himself, and therefore needeth not take heed lest he fall. A man may not imagine himself quite so faulty as he is, (*for who can tell how oft he offendeth?*) who yet may deserve the character of an humble man, if, at the same time that he endeavoureth to improve in virtue, and get clear of every presumptuous sin, he strives to detest, and begs of God to cleanse him from his secret and unsuspected faults. Pride is a vice or moral evil; and nothing can be evil any further than it is in its genuine tendency productive of evil. But what evil effects would an opinion too favourable of ourselves be attended with, provided it did not rise to so high a pitch as to make us think presumptuously and securely of ourselves, contemptuously and uncharitably of our fellow-creatures, and behave irreverently and ungratefully to our Creator? It is, I doubt, almost impossible to hold the balance exactly even without the least inclination to our side; it is impossible for us who are parties to pass judgment on ourselves with the strict rigour of justice, without the least partiality, without any favourable softenings and allowances: all that can be expected from us is, what I believe every wise and modest man doth, viz. that looking around us, and considering how apt every man is, in some degree, to overvalue himself, we learn from hence to entertain and cherish a constant suspicion and misgiving, that we do so too: which misgiving disposeth us to look deeper into ourselves, to trust not so much to our own abilities, as to our vigilance and circumspection, and God's blessing upon us, and to make our humble application to him, that he would *look well, if there be any way of wickedness in us, and lead us in the way everlasting.*

Having thus stated the nature of pride, I proceed,

II. To shew the unreasonableness of this vice.

And this I shall do, by examining our pretensions to pride.

Are we proud of riches? Riches cannot alter the nature of things, they cannot make a man worthy that is worthless in himself: they may command an insipid complaisance, a formal homage, and ceremonious professions of

respect, and teach a servile world to speak a language foreign to their hearts; but where a largeness of soul is wanting, they can never procure an affectionate esteem, grateful sentiments, and an unfeigned love, the willing tribute of a generous heart to merit only. The value of the estate may be very great; but that of the man is not at all greater, if he does not employ his estate as the great engine to procure moral pleasures, and to do benevolent offices. And if it be true wisdom to think that early, which we must think at last, let us now be convinced, which we shall certainly be hereafter, that there is nothing truly valuable, noble, and manly, but the good sense to know our duty, an hearty inclination to practise it, and a determinate steadiness to persevere in it to the end: that the only true substantial greatness is rightly to apprehend, affectionately to worship, and diligently to imitate our heavenly Father. The unthinking may be carried away with appearances instead of realities, but the judicious should consider things intrinsically, and think him the greatest who strives, as much as in him lies, to make others happy by his benevolence, good by his example, and wise by his instructions.

Do we value ourselves upon our power? No; what is remarked by somebody or other is a great truth, viz. That there is no good in power, but merely the power of doing good. Upon our worldly prudence? Those who are acquainted with history, know how often the best-laid designs have proved abortive. Among all the maxims of worldly prudence, this is one of the best, viz. That we should endeavour to discover the reigning passion in every man whom we would manage; and when we have found out that, we have got a handle to turn him which way we please. But then, every man, besides his reigning passion, has his particular caprice or humour, which will make our measures often miscarry. Besides, no one passion is perhaps the perpetual dictator: no; our heart is rather a little commonwealth, where they govern us with an alternate sway; and sometimes our ambition, sometimes our anger, sometimes our fear, or some other affection, is uppermost.

Human policy therefore must be uncertain, because man, who is the subject of it, is so uncertain, wavering, and inconstant; and there can be no fixed and stated maxims to please and manage so changeable and inconsistent a creature: but we may, by certain and unchanging rules, gain the love of that Being, *with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*. No prudence therefore but the spiritual, viz. to please him who is *the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever*, can be certain.

Are you proud of your distinguished virtue? He who is proud of distinguished abilities, learning, and wealth, is not the less able, learned, and wealthy, because he is proud of them. But he who is proud of distinguished virtue, ceaseth to be virtuous by his being so. For the man that is pleased with any degree of virtue, merely because it is uncommon, would be sorry, if what he values himself upon, as a singular mark of distinction, should become common, and all mankind should rise to the same eminence as himself in morality. Now, this temper argues a want of benevolence, and, consequently, of virtue. It shews a mean, narrow, selfish turn of mind, to triumph in any extraordinary attainment, solely because it is peculiar to us, or confined to a select few. A truly generous, benevolent, and virtuous spirit would wish, that all *were not only almost, but altogether, such as he is*; and be the happier in himself, if the bulk of mankind were partakers of that happiness which results from virtue.

Besides, those who seldom act or think nobly, may be proud of what they so seldom think or act. But to those who constantly entertain great thoughts, and do noble actions, to them they are become so familiar, that they make no great impressions upon them. At the same time that they rise above the common level of action, they think they do nothing but what is common; because nothing but what is common is done by them. The favours which you cannot receive without warm emotions of joy and gratitude, they can bestow with great coolness and unconcernedness; because, though to receive such favours is something unusual to you, yet to do them is nothing new to them.

The more virtuous any man is, the

more modest and unpretending he must be. He must be sensible of the numerous disorders which lurk within, of his sickly appetites, and the corruption of his heart; and how often the precarious light of reason, that candle which God hath lighted up in his mind, has been put out by some sudden gust of passion. If a child could read those foolish, vain, wicked imaginations, which the best of us have sometimes indulged; we should be ashamed to look him in the face, and be out of conceit with ourselves: and yet we do not sometimes stifle them immediately; though we know that he, whose tremendous Majesty fills the whole compass of heaven and earth, cannot but be privy to them, and discern the secret meditations of our heart. The knowledge of the greatest Being, who *understandeth our thoughts long before*, hath less influence, than that of the silliest of mortals would have, supposing he could know the inward workings of the soul. We are not worthy to approach him, who dwelleth in unapproachable glory, but through the merits of our Redeemer. We could not expect any instances of goodness from a being less than infinitely good.

And yet, notwithstanding our many imperfections, I question whether, upon a supposition that all of us were to be the judges and rewarders of our own merits, this world would be half large enough, that every one might take a little. Several other worlds must be taken in, to recompense us, as we think, fully, and adjust the rewards to our imaginary deserts.

He who thinks that he has no weaknesses to subdue, either wholly or in part; no virtuous habits to acquire, or, at least, to improve and perfect; he who, in short, thinks himself quite good enough, proves, by the very thought, that he is not so. Then our salvation is most in danger, when we dismiss all apprehensions about it.

But if virtue (human virtue) affords no just grounds for pride, much less does human knowledge, which bears no proportion to our ignorance. The greatest and the least objects equally baffle our inquiries. Too great and disproportioned an object embarrasses and overlets the understanding; too little an one

eludes and escapes it. It is God alone, whose almighty power nothing is so great that it can encumber; whose infinite wisdom, nothing is so little that it can escape. Presumptuous man! wouldst thou understand the manner in which three persons exist in the same unbounded essence? Before thou strive to fathom the nature of the greatest of all beings; first, if thou canst, comprehend how the least of beings exist, animals a hundred times less than a mite, myriads of such animals as can only be discerned by the help of glasses. If the whole body be so minute, as to be undiscoverable by the naked eye; how much less the limbs, of which that whole body is compounded? How much less still the nerves, the veins, the blood in those veins, the animal spirits in that blood; till we approach to the very borders of nothing? For these animals contain in miniature, all those parts which we have in larger dimensions. In short, for one thing that we can possibly account for in the book of nature, there are millions of things of which we can give no account: yet we, who find almost all things so puzzling and unaccountable in the book of nature, expect that every thing in the book of grace, which proceeds from the same author, should be plain and level to our capacities.

True knowledge is one of the strongest fences against pride. When good sense and reason speak, they come, like their great Author, God, in the still small voice, without any empty noise or loquacity, or over-bearing pretensions. And those who keep the best sense within, seldom hang out the sign of knowledge. Men of this stamp will own their entire ignorance in many things, and their imperfect knowledge in all the rest. Whereas the ignorant are sometimes peremptory and positive in matters quite above their sphere, and, like some creatures, are the bolder for being blind. In a word, the ingenuous will confess the weakness of their reason, and the presumptuous betray it by their being so.

If we are born without an aptitude to learn, and a genius for knowledge, we may resemble the woman in the gospel, who had *spent all she had upon physicians*, and yet *grew no better, but rather worse*.

All the tutors and instructors in the universe will avail nothing: for they *cannot open the eyes of those that are born blind*. But, granting the utmost happiness of natural parts, yet he who confineth himself to one province of knowledge, cannot understand even that thoroughly; because there is that harmony and alliance between the several branches of science, that one reflects light upon another. He, on the other hand, who grasps at every part of knowledge, is only a superficial finatter in all, and is too general a trader in the republic of letters to become rich. A man of a slow capacity is apt to sit down under a despondency of making any advances in literature: men of quick parts are sometimes distracted with variety of pursuits. So many thoughts are continually rising in their minds, that, like trees overladen with fruit, they seldom bring any to its just perfection.

After all, what signifies all the learning in the world, without a just discernment and penetration? And what is the result of our penetration, but that we see through the littleness of almost every thing, and our own especially? That we discern, and are disgusted with, several follies and absurdities, which are hid from persons of a slower apprehension? So that our superior sagacity resembles the pretended second-sightedness of some people, by which they are said to see several uncomfortable and dismal objects, which escape the rest of the world. This man ranges the circuit of the heavens; knows the laws by which the planets revolve; sees every thing regular; then descends into himself, and finds, by surveying the world within, that man alone is irregular and eccentric. He can account for the uses of tempests, earthquakes, and thunder; and perceives, that all storms and tempests, except those in a man's breast, fulfil the word of God, and obey his will.

Some may perhaps value themselves upon the strength of their genius, the largeness of their heart, even as *the sand upon the sea-shore*, and the brightness of their parts! Alas! the strength of the passions, and the quickness of the appetites, generally keep pace with the brightness of the imagination. And hence it comes to pass, that those who

have, with an uncommon compass of thought, inculcated excellent rules of morality in their writings, have sometimes broke through them all in their practice: the brightness of their parts enabling them to lay down fine precepts, and the strength of their passions tempting them to transgress them. A man may discourse admirably well upon œconomy, who never was master of it in the conduct of life; because he may take a pleasure in discoursing upon œconomy, or any other subject, upon which he can display a beautiful fancy: but to look carefully into his affairs, to balance his accounts, and to proportion his expences to his income, is a drudgery to which he cares not to stoop. There is not a greater inlet to vice and misery, than to have (which is generally the case of men of wit, and the cause of the irregularity of their conduct) too much spirit to confine one's self to the common business of life; and too much fire and passion to relish the calm satisfactions of it. For this temper puts a man always in quest of something transporting, and every way fitted to an high taste. To a man of strong sensations every delight that is gentle, seems dull; and every thing, but what is high-seasoned, flat and tasteless. The consequence of which is, that disdainng common blessings, and not able to enjoy himself without something out of the usual road, he overleaps these bounds, which confine meaner mortals, and precipitates himself into an endless train of inconveniencies.

But let us suppose, what is not a very common case, that a brightness of imagination, and a well-poised judgment, are happily united in the same person; yet the ablest writer, the brightest genius, the greatest man that ever lived; nay, an archangel of the highest class may say, "O my God! that I live, and that I please, if ever I please, is owing to thee. May it be then my uppermost view to do thy pleasure, from whom I have the ability to please!"

How vain and uncertain all things are here below, appears from this, that we should even reason itself, that ennobling quality, that boasted prerogative, and distinguishing perfection of human nature, upon a very precarious tenure; and something, as one expresseth it, with a human shape and voice, has often sur-

vived every thing human besides. The brain, by too great quickness and stretch of thought, like a chariot-wheel, by the rapidity of its motion, takes fire; the thin partitions, which divided wit from madness, are broken down. The most penetrating and sparkling geniuses border upon, and sometimes more than border upon, downright frenzy. They shew us even then, in their lucid intervals, the monuments and traces of what they have been, like the monuments of old Rome, majestic even in its ruins. Their sudden starts of sense, though soon broken off, give us more pleasure, than the sober uniform thoughts of men of slower apprehension: just as the maimed statues, the broken pillars, and imperfect triumphal arches of old Rome, delight us more, than the entire performances of less able and less masterly hands.

If then reason itself, which distinguisheth us from brutes, be so very precarious, and depends upon such a fine and subtle contexture of the brain, as is liable to be disordered by several accidents; the observation I would draw from hence is very material, and worth our consideration: if mankind were to be vain of nothing but what is their lasting property, of which they cannot be stripped; they would be vain of nothing at all; there would be no such thing as vanity.

Art thou then proud of knowledge? Alas! the dim light of human reason looks feeble and languid at the first thought and contemplation of that *Father of lights, in whom there is no darkness* at all. Dost thou pride thyself upon thy power? All the little grandeur we can boast, is lost in the consideration of that *only Potentate, who dwelleth in light, which no one can approach to*. Art thou elate upon the account of an ample fortune? Consider him to whom the *whole world* belongs, and *all that is therein*; who, wanting nothing himself, supplies the wants of every other being. All human pride shrinks into nothing, when we contemplate that great Being, *who is all in all*. And the man who is possessed with just notions of an all-perfect God, will never make a God of any thing else, much less of himself.

Dost thou value thyself upon popular applause, and a great name? Think how many that have made a distinguished

figure in the world, are dead and unregarded, as if they never had been; their deaths unlamented, their vacancy filled up, their persons missed no more than a drop of water, when taken from the whole ocean. And is it worth our while to strive to please a vain fantastic world which will soon disregard us, and think itself full as well without us; instead of laying out our endeavours to please that almighty Being, whose inexhaustible power and goodness will make his servants happy to all eternity? How ridiculous are all our aims, except this be the grand aim, in which all the rest centre! A man, for instance, makes it his business to ensure to himself a name after death; that is, to save four or five letters (for what is a name besides?) from oblivion; and yet shall be neglectful of securing immortal happiness: he shall be fond of an imaginary life after death; and yet make no provision for that real life, which is to last for ever and ever; solicitous to have his name written and preserved in any book, but in that book, where it will only be of service to him, *the book of life*. O virtue! when this solemn pageantry of earthly grandeur shall be no more; when all distinctions, but moral and religious, shall vanish; when this earth shall be dissolved; when the moon shall be no more a light by night, nor the sun by day; thou shalt still survive thy votary's immortal friend, thou shalt appear, like thy great Author, in perfect beauty; thy lustre undiminished, and thy glory unperishable.

Let him therefore that glorieth, glory in the Lord. He alone, who gave and upholds all the powers of soul and body, he alone deserveth the glory of them. As we are creatures, the work of God's hands, we have nothing to glory of: but as we are sinners, and, in that respect, the work of our own hands, we have much to be ashamed of. We then give the greatest proof to God of our worthiness, when we have a deep sense, and make an humble confession, of our own unworthiness.

To God therefore, and to him only, be ascribed, as is most due, all might, &c.

SERMON XIV.

On the Advantages of Affliction.

Occasioned by the death of Mr. Burton, of Montpelier-row, in Twickenham.

[Preached in Twickenham chapel, on Midlent Sunday, 1742.]

PSALM LXXvii. 3.

When I am in heaviness, I will think upon God.

THE whole psalm is written with a very beautiful spirit of poetry; and if we consider it merely as an human composition, may justly challenge our highest admiration. In the former part, the Psalmist vents an heart overcharged with grief, and writes with the highest emotions of sorrow. *In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord, my sore ran in the night, and ceased not, my soul refused to be comforted.* And again, at the 7th verse, *Will the Lord absent himself for ever, and will he be no more favourable? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?* Thus does he discharge the fulness of his soul; till, by a very natural and yet very surprising transition, from a rehearsal of his own woes, he passes on to celebrate the marvellous acts of God. For, to relieve himself under the pressure of his present afflictions, he has recourse to the former mercies which God had vouchsafed to the Israelites: *Surely I will remember thy wonders of old.* This ushers in those sublime flights of poetry, which are peculiar to the genius of the eastern nations: *The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee: they were afraid: the depths also were troubled, &c.* Then, to represent the unsearchableness of God, he compares him, by a very beautiful allusion, to a being walking upon the waters, the traces of whose feet could not therefore be discovered: *Thy way is in the sea, and thy paths in the great waters, and thy foot-steps are not known.*

If we should set aside the sanction of divine authority, which stamps an additional value upon the psalm; yet it could not fail to affect every reader of a refined taste. And when we either consider those melting strains in which he describes his

own

own woes, or that exalted vein in which he represents the majesty of God; we shall be at a loss, whether to admire more the greatness of that genius, which could acquit itself with so masterly an hand in both the pathetic and sublime way of writing; or the justness of that judgment, which could with so dexterous an address, with so easy, and, I had almost said, so natural an art, glide from the one to the other.

The author of the psalm had a mind deeply tinctured with piety. When his heart was in heaviness, he thought upon God: but to think on him then with pleasure, he must have set God constantly before him in the smooth seasons of life. This will lead me to shew,

I. The happiness and reasonableness of turning our thoughts to God in general.

II. The peculiar advantages of affliction, to bring us to a just sense of God, and our duty.

I. I am to shew the happiness and reasonableness of turning our thoughts to God in general.

To repair to God only, when under affliction, is to use him, as some conceited philosophers have done, who never have recourse to him, and take him into their schemes, but when they are in distress, when they meet with some difficulty, which they cannot plausibly account for or get over, without calling him in to their aid.

Besides, never is there more occasion for good-humour, cheerfulness, and an undisturbed serenity of mind, than when we form our religious notices. For, though the brightest ideas of the Deity may be retained and cherished under any indisposition of mind or body; yet to retain and cherish them at that juncture, they must be imprinted in indelible characters on the soul, when it was in an easy situation; otherwise, religion will not brighten up our minds, and *lighten the darkness* of them; our minds will darken and discolour religion. And what has given some people a distaste for it, is, that having never applied themselves seriously to it, but when they were in a dull, joyless, sullen humour, which represented every thing they were conversant about to be dull and joyless; the notions of religion, and of a joyless state, have been, however unduly connected, ever after inseparable. By meditating

on God only, or even chiefly, in a melancholy hour, you will associate the idea of gloominess and horror with that of religion: you will view him, just as he was worshipped in old Gothic buildings, in a dim solemn light, which sheds a pensive gloom over, and saddens every object. You will not serve him with that gladness which he requires: for *God loveth a cheerful worshipper*, as well as *a cheerful giver*. But you will repair with reluctance and constraint to that service, which is perfect freedom.

We are indigent creatures, insufficient of ourselves for our own happiness, and therefore ever seeking it somewhere else. But where we shall effectually seek for it, is the question. Unless the thoughtful and the pensive direct their thoughts to, and cast their cares upon God, there will be little difference between them and the gay and unthinking, besides this, that the latter will have more of the vanity of life, but they themselves more of the vexations of it. If there were not another life, our business would be, not to alarm the thinking faculty, but to lay our too active and unquiet thoughts to rest. The mind would be like a froward child, ever fretful when fully awake; and therefore to be played and lulled asleep as fast as we can. Our main happiness would be, to forget our misery and ourselves; to forget, that we are a set of beings, who, after we have toiled out the live-long day of human life, in variety of hardships, are, instead of receiving our wages at the close of it, to sleep out one long eternal night in an utter extinction of being.

If man had an ample fund of happiness in himself, without any deficiency, whence is it, that he is continually looking out abroad for foreign amusements; amusements, which are of no other use, but to keep off troublesome and ungrateful impressions, and to make us insensible of the tediousness of living; amusements, which rather suspend a sense of uneasiness, than give us any substantial satisfaction; and keep the soul in an equal poise between pleasure and pain? And is this the great end which we have in view? Supposing we could compass it; yet if it be better not to be at all, than to be miserable; then certainly just not to be miserable, without any positive happiness, is much at one, as not to be

at all. Whence is it, that that restless thing, the soul, too enterprising to trace every thing else, yea the deep things of God, is yet too cowardly to inquire into itself, and to view the workings of that ever-loved, yet ever-avoided, object? Whence is it, that the mind, whose active energy prompts her to give a free and unconfined range to her thoughts on other subjects, nay, to make, if it were possible, the tour of the whole universe; yet, when she comes to dwell at home, and to survey the little world within, flags in her vivacity, feels herself in a forlorn condition, and finds a drowsiness and melancholy gloom hanging upon her? Whence is it, but that the soul, whenever it turns its thoughts inward, finds within a frightful void of solid happiness, without any possibility in itself of filling it up? Indeed, in a circle of gay follies, or in a multiplicity of pursuits, when a succession of different objects is continually striking upon the mind, the capacity of the soul is taken up, and it forgets that inward poverty and indigence which nothing can effectually relieve, but the unsearchable riches of the love of God: but when we step aside from the noise and beaten tracks of life, into solitude and retirement, we soon perceive, that we are, without some business to engage, or some recreation to divert our attention, an insupportable burden to ourselves. You fancy the man, whose daily labour serves for little else but to get his daily bread, and whose daily bread just refreshes and strengthens him to undergo his daily labour, to be a very miserable object; and perhaps he is so. Would you make him more miserable? Give him a fortune, which shall set him at rest from his labours, and leave him nothing at all to do; and then the wearisomeness, which resulted from a continual drudgery, will be nothing comparable to another kind of wearisomeness, far more irksome—the being weary of himself. Observe great numbers of the opulent and the great: what can be oftener from home than their persons? their thoughts, which are continually from home, ever wandering abroad, and returning unsatisfied. None is more miserable than a man distracted with variety of business, except he who has no business, no amusement at all. Diversions and pastimes, properly so called

(for they answer no other end, but to pass away our time), may have the effect of opiates, to beget a short oblivion of our cares and ourselves: but the only cordial to invigorate our spirits, and to give us an exquisite relish and enjoyment of this life, is the well-grounded hope of a better, through the merits of Jesus Christ.

If then any one should ask, *Who will shew us any good?* who will point out the way to felicity to us? we must answer, in the Psalmist's words, *Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us:* for thou art our happiness, who alone canst give a stability to our moral pleasures, and secure us from natural evil, or support us under it. God has styled himself light: and as the whole material creation would be involved in one horrid and uncomfortable gloom, if light did not enliven it with its smiles, and beautify it with a rich variety of colours; so would the spiritual creation live in an eternal blackness of darkness, did not God lift up the light of his countenance upon it, brightening it with the beams of his truth, and cheering it with the influences of his favour. Earthly objects may indeed swell and puff up the mind with unsubstantial bliss: but nothing can fill up every void in the soul, and satisfy the whole compass of our desires with the fulness of solid and unmingled happiness, but that supreme good, that infinite Being, *who is above all, and through all, and in us all.*

Such truths as these we are too apt to overlook in the day of prosperity; and therefore,

II. Adversity has its peculiar advantages, to bring us to a just sense of God, and our duty to him.

For, first, adversity will make us, however unwilling, reflect and descend into ourselves.

When we enjoy one uninterrupted flow of worldly bliss, when we sail along a smooth and unruffled surface with easy and gentle gales; reason, our pilot which should sit vigilant at the helm, is too often lulled into a fatal security. But adversity rouses the mind from its indolence, puts us upon thinking closely, and turning our thoughts every way. Those who have met with no misfortunes to mortify that pride of heart, which is the growth of prosperity, say to themselves, *Come on, let us enjoy the good things that are*

are present; let us fill ourselves with costly wine and ointments, and let no flower of the spring pass by us; let us crown ourselves with rose-buds, before they be withered. Thus the glittering scenes of life beget a thousand gay ideas, a swarm of fantastic images, which, like insects, wanton and flutter in the warm sunshine of prosperity; but disappear, die, and are no more, upon the first inclemency of the season.

It is amazing, that men, in the fulness of health and plenty, when every thing smiles around them, should shut out the consideration of that Being, to whom they owe the fulness of their health and plenty: like groves in all the freshness of their verdure, with all their leaves thick upon them, shutting out the beams of that sun, to which they are indebted for their cheerful verdure: yet so it is: for what have the majority of the wealthy, the mighty, and the great, been doing in all ages? Why, just what they did in the days of Noah: *they did eat, they drank; they bought, they sold; they planted, they builded*; that is, the diversions and business of this life engrossed their attention, till the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Just so men do now, till sickness confines them to their bed, or some dire misfortune checks their career. Which makes Jehoshaphat's example more remarkable: *When God had established the kingdom in his hand, and he had riches and honour in abundance; his heart was lifted up, not with pride and insolence, but in the ways of the Lord.*

How thoughtless, how unreflecting upon their past conduct were Joseph's brethren, till Joseph's hard usage gave them a compunction of mind, and a deep sense of their former sins? *And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear: therefore is this distress come upon us.* It is the remark of the prophet Amos, that *they who lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, who chaunt to the sound of the viol, who invent instruments of music, who drink wine in bowls, are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.*

I would by no means recommend a censorious, sour severity, which is perhaps

as odious in the sight of God, as a thoughtless fantastic levity; and is certainly more incorrigible. For a philosophical, supercilious sullenness, which proceeds from thinking habitually in a wrong channel, is a vice seldom amended; because thought, which should cure the distemper, confirms and rivets it. But faults arising from want of thinking, a collected way of thinking for some time, will correct and set right. Now sickness, pain, and trouble, the most effectual and persuasive teachers, will make a man feel what he is, a poor helpless creature; recollect what he has been, and look forward to what he shall be to all eternity.

Little do they think, who are inured to ease and delicacy, whose affluence empowers them to do good; how many thousands are wearing out life in a sad variety of pain, or are dying perhaps of poverty and a broken heart; at the same instant that they are expending their time and fortune in a round of folly, sin, and vanity, unconscious of each liberal, each tender, sentiment.

But adversity quickens our compassion; corrects that levity, which is the inlet to vice; and begets a fixed thoughtfulness and sedateness, the soil which virtue loves: it takes off our insensibility, breaks the fierceness of our nature, and softens us into humanity. For when our hearts are like melting wax, they are most ductile, tender, and susceptible of humane impressions. We are acquainted with grief; and, by feeling misery and pain, we learn to have a fellow-feeling for the calamities of our fellow-creatures.

Secondly, Adversity puts our virtue to the test, and proves the sincerity of it.

It is no great virtue for a man to be honest, who possesses an ample fortune, though it would be a very great crime for him not to be so. For what temptations can he have to dishonesty, who has the discretion to extract and enjoy the sweets of a great estate, without damaging or hurting the flower from which they proceed? But to hold fast to that which is good, in the lowest ebb of fortune; to retain our integrity and intrinsic worth, when stripped of every thing that we were worth besides, and surrounded with whatever is grievous, is the strongest evidence that can be given of our love of goodness.

goodness. Thousands have acted contrary to their conscience, and, with a behaviour more pitiable than their circumstances, crouched beneath the pressure of hard fortune, to low and sordid compliances; who, it is to be charitably hoped, would have stood upright and unbending without that galling load upon them.

For how shall a man possess his soul in patience, who has little or nothing besides to possess? Now he finds, that a little merit, with a world of suppleness, dexterity, and address, may facilitate his advancement; but great merit, and a rigorous unpliant adherence to the rules of morality, are too often bars to it; that the way from low fortune to greatness is up a steep and craggy hill: to climb up it by a straight and direct ascent, is almost impracticable: to reach the summit of it, or even to rise to any eminence, he must generally fall into crooked and indirect paths, which have several artful turns and windings.

It is easy for him who has a sufficiency of fortune, and well-regulated passions, to look upon a barren superfluity of wealth, without casting a wishful look, or a passionate side-glance towards it; to sit loose and indifferent to the world in one sense, viz. to have no selfish and indirect views; and yet in another sense, to be a great lover of it, by affectionately wishing, and vigorously promoting, the general good of it. The great difficulty is, to act and think in some measure above the world, while poverty exposes us to the neglect and contempt of it; to scorn to build our fortunes on the ruins of our probity; to despise the little injuries we receive, and to pity the little men that do them; little, I mean, in themselves, and in the eye of reason; though they may be very great in the eye of the world, and perhaps much greater in their own eyes.

How despicable therefore are those, who, though flowing in plenty, have lost a good name, merely to gain a fine title; have sacrificed the true greatness of the mind, for the outside of greatness, some external mark of distinction; and have ceased to be honourable, that they might be styled so? How truly estimable those, who have proved their love of virtue and truth to be *stronger than death*, by foregoing the blandishments of

life, and encountering the terrors of death for the sake of them?

Such were the primitive martyrs, men of whom this world was not worthy, and therefore worthy of a better. Such was (a name above all names) our blessed Saviour, who *left us an example of suffering, that we might follow his steps*.

Had he appeared with all the littleness of greatness and power, with which the Jews invest their Messiah; had he assumed a temporal kingdom; had he *bound kings in chains, and nobles in links of iron*; his example would have been of little or no use; or at least only to those who move in an higher orb: not to mention, how inconsistent such a pattern would have been with a religion, which teaches us to wean our affections from earthly things. But by submitting to a lower scene of action, by *taking upon him the form of a servant*, by being content to be ennobled by himself, which is the truest ennoblement; his example is of more universal influence. This gave him an opportunity to exemplify several virtues, which the bulk of mankind has every day occasion to practise; such as humility, patience, resignation to God, and contentedness in the lowest station. *Father, saith he, just before his crucifixion, if it be possible, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.* And just before his death he cries out, *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.* And again, *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.* Here are no unnatural rants, no undistinguishing glare of eloquence, no high-flown expressions, such as the pride of philosophy has dictated to its votaries: the thoughts are great, without being extravagant; easy, without being low and groveling. As a man, he wishes, if it were possible, the removal of his calamities; as a good and great man, he resigns himself without reserve to the will of his Creator. He affects no insensibility of pain; he speaks the genuine language of human nature, but of human nature greatly strengthened by grace and reason, which may graft upon and improve, but never destroy nature.

And indeed, through the whole tenor of our Saviour's life, there was nothing shewy or ostentatious; nothing, that was fitter to dazzle the eyes of the beholders, than to *guide their feet in the way of peace*. The

The social as well as solitary virtues shone with gentle, yet with sprightly, beams. Piety sat gracefully upon him, with an easy greatness, with a sober majesty, and without any frightening and forbidding appearances.

Thirdly, Adversity is of service to disengage our minds from earthly pursuits, and to fix our thoughts, where true joys are to be found. God, says Solomon, *has set the days of adversity over against those of prosperity, that a man should find nothing after him*, viz. after God to complain of, or to order for the better. The meaning is, God hath so balanced and mixed adversity and prosperity together, that a man, upon a review of the whole, upon a full and impartial estimate of things, should have no just grounds to arraign the conduct of Providence, but shall find he has had more good fortune than he deserved, and as much as was beneficial to him; and no more ill-fortune than was necessary to correct his faults, moderate his affections, and exercise his virtues.

Accordingly we have instances of those who, living in a pompous worthlessness, and thinking at that time, that *to-morrow would be as to day, and more abundant*, would, in all probability, have been utterly undone for ever, if they had not been almost undone here by some signal calamity. A reverse of fortune has forced upon them a course of life and train of thinking, which they would scarce have fallen into of themselves. Being obliged to retire from the great world, they have, in process of time, regretted nothing so much, as that they did not retire sooner, to think strongly, apprehend clearly, and reason justly; to penetrate deeply to the bottom of things, and to look far to the end of them. And when the retrospect upon the past has afforded them no comfort, they have opened and brightened the prospect before them.

For riches oft beget in us a fondness for the present scene of things, and a deadness of affection to God and heavenly things. But afflictions set the soul free, and leave it disencumbered in the pursuit of heaven. Convinced by melancholy proof of the insufficiency of worldly things, we take sanctuary in the fulness of the divine sufficiency. Finding ourselves disconsolate in a barren and dry land, where *no water is*; we desire those rivers of

pleasure, which flow at God's right hand for evermore.

Prayer is a natural motion of the soul to God in any deep distress; it becomes then our necessary refuge, even though it might not be our free choice before: which proves, that religion, however it may be stifled in prosperity, is interwoven in our frame. A man greatly aggrieved by oppressive power, without a prospect of having his grievances redressed below, cannot but make his humble silent appeal to the great God of heaven, as to the last resort of justice, who helpeth them to right, that suffer wrong. We cannot help looking up to that Being, *the Father of mercies, and the God of comforts, from whom our help cometh*, when we see ourselves abandoned and forlorn, when we look around us, but there is none to save us from imminent ruin.

Then, whatever inborn vigour of mind we may have, we fly to God, and beg an additional strength from him to support us under our calamities, grace to turn them to our advantage, and eternal happiness to reward them. Then we chiefly value this life, as it has a connection with a future: a life in which we should be unwilling, were the choice given us, to tread the same round over, and to measure time back again; and yet man goes on, still deceived by past pleasures, still depending on those to come; till his days are run out to the very dregs: whereas the obvious thought is, if so little satisfaction is to be had, and so much pain to be undergone in the greenness and verdure of youth, *what shall be done in the dry tree?*

To a man at ease in his possessions, the dread of dissolution, which sometimes poisons all his enjoyments, shall be often a greater and more painful ill, than his dissolution, considered in itself, and the shadow of death shall be more formidably large than the reality: but a good man in distress could wish, if it were consistent with the will of his Creator, *to be dissolved, and to be with Christ*: he wants to render unto God *what is God's*; viz. his soul, which bears that image and impress of the Deity, which it has been his business to preserve bright and unsullied: he thinks it would not be worth his while to live a moment here, if he were not to live for ever hereafter.

I have

I have been led into this train of reflections by the death of a person, whom we all know, and to whom I have particular obligations. The loss of even an inoffensive person, with whom we constantly travelled together in the common road of life, without any other circumstance to endear his memory, cannot but in some measure affect an humane heart. Every place where he generally was, suggests the idea of him : we miss him there, and scarce at first recollect, that he is now no more ; but as soon as we do, that very recollection brings a melancholy thought across the mind ; till, by degrees, the impression wears off, and the idea of him is disjoined from that of the place, which must *know him no more*. How much more then ought some of us here to be affected, who have lately been deprived of a very worthy and esteemable acquaintance, right in his principles, regular in his practice, and easy and affable in his conversation ?

Frank, open, and ingenuous by nature, cautious and prudent by his knowledge of the world, ever ready to oblige ; he lived without a formed design of displeasing any body, and yet without the vain chimerical hopes of pleasing every body.

He was a very proper person to have recourse to upon any intricate emergency. For he at once preserved the cool judgment of a disinterested person, and yet entered as heartily and thoroughly into the affair, as if he had been personally interested in it ; fruitful of expedients, with the good sense to fix upon that which was best, and most to the purpose.

He had so established a character for punctuality, fairness, and honesty, in his business, that people loved to have to do with a man of his unsuspected veracity ; above those indirect arts which a great soul despises, and a good one detests ; the little temporary expedients of men, who want to serve a present exigency, and procure some short-lived advantages, but have not sense enough to consider the remote consequences of an action, and to think of the prophet's question, *What will ye do in the end thereof ?* For certain it is, that knavery cannot be long concealed, nor honestly counterfeited : and *the lip of truth is established for ever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment*. There was a dignity in his aspect, weight in his words, and an openness and simplicity in

his actions, which engaged men's esteem for him, and made them repose a firm confidence in him. It seemed to be his opinion, that, in complicated cases, our second thoughts were better than our first, and that we ought to deliberate long before we proceed to action : but that in plain cases, our first sentiments, the sentiments of genuine, untainted nature, were better than our second ; and that to deliberate, was only to endeavour to find out some specious refinements and artful glosses, by which we might, with much ado, reconcile those practices to our conscience, to which it was at first view strongly abhorrent. He never therefore deviated from the plain high-road of honesty, into those crooked and intricate by-paths, in which, where one has shortened his way to riches, hundreds have lost and bewildered themselves.

That he was an affectionate husband to one of the best and tenderest of wives, and a kind indulgent master to his servants, are confessed parts of his character ; and yet these are the surest tests of an habitual good-nature, and a prevailing sweetness of disposition.

Being bred a scholar, he had a capacity and knowledge, but not a mind and spirit, above his profession : for he as diligently applied himself to it, as if he had been by nature and education only fitted for that sphere. Before his retirement from business and the world, he had an enlarged conversation in it : but though he often kept company with men of loose principles, he never departed from his own, which he had early imbibed, and thoroughly digested. For men of this stamp seldom make any lasting impressions upon persons of strong sense, and a thoroughly good disposition : the utmost they can do is to stagger weak men, and to make those that are already in some degree bad, much worse. He was a constant frequenter of the church during his health, and, when his illness confined him to his house, a constant communicant at the three great seasons, and received the sacrament with that awful composure of behaviour, which bespoke a mind recollected and attentive, and affected all about him with a correspondent seriousness.

His faults and frailties were such as all men are liable to : but his perfections were the attainments of few in comparison,

son, particularly the great patience with which he bore the severe trials which God laid upon him. He seemed to enjoy himself and his friends under such afflictive circumstances, as would have made most others a burthen to themselves, and uneasy to every one that came near them; and was a signal example, that the greatest advantage one man can have above another in this life, arises from the temper and disposition of the mind; that temper, which softens every care, and improves every blessing. For he seemed to have had more true peace of mind under a lasting complication of distempers, than others are possessed of in the fulness of health and vigour; who want they know not what, and are uneasy they know not why: and, if at any time his spirits were depressed by long-continued pain, conversation with an intimate friend would break the gloom that hung upon him, and brighten up his soul. Indeed his malady grew upon him to that degree, that it was almost cruel to wish him a longer continuance among us: all that his friends could desire, was an easy passage out of this world into a better, where *there is no pain or sorrow*. His soul is now enlarged from that corruptible body to which it was united; and released from those miseries, which, by virtue of that union, it underwent. How soon we, who in the midst of life are in death, may follow him, God only knows: each day brings us nearer to eternity; and it should be our main endeavour, that each may bring us nearer to a blessed eternity.

But, while we are in the body, we must more or less struggle with difficulties, and combat with temptations. While we live, we must persevere, without slackening our industry, *to fight this good fight*: when we die, we have gained the decisive victory: and when we come before the throne of grace, we shall receive a glorious triumph; a triumph indeed, where, instead of the senseless noise of an undistinguished and undistinguishing populace, a numerous choir of ennobled spirits shall hail with joyful acclamations their happy fellow-servant: while, to crown all, the great Judge pronounces the blessed sentence: *Well done, thou good and faithful servant! enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*

S E R M O N XV.

On Faith, Benevolence, &c.

[Being a farewell Sermon, preached at Twickenham chapel, June 20, 1742.]

I TIMOTHY, i. 19.

Holding faith, and a good conscience,

THIS being the last time that I shall speak to you in the capacity which I now bear, of your preacher and minister, I have chosen these words, the advice of St. Paul to Timothy, as containing the sum and substance of our duty. In discoursing upon which, I shall throw together some few thoughts,

I. Upon faith;

II. Upon a good conscience;

III. Take my leave of you, with a short address to you.

I. The first point is, that you would seriously consider the strong evidences of your faith; evidences so strong, that he would be deemed a madman, who was not determined by much less in his secular affairs. If any one should go about to disprove the conquests of Alexander, he would be thought not to be in his sound mind: and yet there are much stronger proofs for the reality of the miracles recorded in scripture, and particularly in the New Testament, than there are for the victories of Alexander, or even for the being of such a man.

Let it no more stagger your faith, that there are so great a number of unbelievers, than it ought to influence your practice, that there are so great a number of wicked men. Besides, you may be deceived, by mistaking second qualities for first. A propensity to think out of the common road, may be by no means the leading quality among those that are styled unbelievers: it may be only a secondary one, and subservient to a primary desire, that of being in the fashion. These very men who now affect to be thought unbelievers, might, probably, if they had lived in the times of the grand rebellion, have set up for saints; because a reputed sanctity was as much the mode of that age, as infidelity is of this. There is a torrent of opinions peculiar to almost every age: men of light unbalanced minds, like light matter, are borne down by the current;

current; and men of solid sense do not always meet with the success which they deserve in stemming and opposing it. The principles of Christianity may be out of fashion; but what they want in the fashion, they make up in weight, solidity, and intrinsic worth.

For one that has been made a proselyte to Deism, by reading, thinking, and studying, there are multitudes, who become so by conversation with those, who have no way of keeping themselves in countenance, but by discountenancing religion. And what wonder is it, that persons should be laughed out of religion, who never reasoned themselves into it? A man in his younger years must be well disposed, and of a serious thinking turn, to converse at large, and yet continue a Christian: but if he be of a serious turn, and impartially weigh the numerous proofs for it, he cannot but continue a Christian. For Christianity has too many and strong appearances of truth, for any, who deliberately and unbiassedly attends to them, to believe it an imposture. It has been *sifted as wheat*: and the consequence is, that some few trifling considerations, which had been formerly alleged in favour of it, have been set aside, *like the chaff, which the wind scattereth away from the face of the earth*; but its solid and substantial arguments, like the *good seed*, fall not to the ground, but remain firm, without any debasing mixtures.

To reject Christianity, because of the difficulties with which its doctrines are attended; it is to reject it as false, for that which seems to be an argument of its truth. I will explain myself immediately. Christianity, supposing its truth, is a revelation from God.—A revelation from God must contain something of the nature, will, and counsels of God, as far as they relate to us.—Now, the will, counsels, and nature, of an infinite Being, must be, in a great measure, unsearchable to, and incomprehensible by beings of such a scanty pittance of understanding, as we have;—that is, they must be encumbered with insuperable difficulties.—To object difficulties then against Christianity, is to make that an argument against the truth of Christianity, which Christianity, supposing its truth, must in the nature of the thing be attended with. The united force of unbelievers has never been able to invalidate the several argu-

ments that have been brought to prove the truth of revelation; and while these prove it to be true, difficulties cannot alter the nature of things; they cannot make that to be false, for the truth of which we have forcible proofs.

Listen not therefore to the suggestions of designing men. Under a pretence of banishing your apprehensions of a future judgment, they will only dash your hopes, and weaken your expectations of a blessed immortality; alarming those very apprehensions, which they promised to remove, by adding to your other terrors, this new fear, which will continually haunt you; a fear, lest you have sinned in dismissing your first persuasion for very slight and frivolous reasons. There may be several who have just sense enough to see there are difficulties in Christianity; but not sense enough to see they are but difficulties: and these may be confirmed infidels, mere *reeds shaken with the wind*, with every blast of vain doctrine. But where there are no insuperable prejudices of education in the case; take it for granted, that men of cool heads, who dare think home, who dare follow truth with the same indifference, as a traveller inquires after the best road that leads to his journey's end, do not think so differently in material points as you may imagine. They may hang out false colours; but, depend upon it, the utmost length men are capable of going, who are thoroughly willing and able to drive each argument to an head, is to have some doubts and scruples, which are preponderated by an exceeding weight of evidence on the other side. Absolute infallible certainty is in heaven, and we are upon earth; but there is such a degree of moral certainty, as is sufficient to overbalance all doubts. We know every objection against Christianity as well as they do; and there is not the least shadow of a demonstration against it: but the reasons for it are so strong, that though they do not amount to a strict demonstration, they make near approaches to it.

I know the firmness of our assent does not depend so much on outward evidences, be they never so forcible, as on the inward frame and bent of the mind. Yet I take it to be almost as impossible for a man, supposing his faculties to be good, and duly exercised, to be deceived entirely in a point of moment; as it is for him, when

when under the influence of some criminal passion, not to deceive himself in part. The case is the same in relation to very material errors, as it is in regard to secret vices. The latter may escape our observation, as to any particular, distinct, explicit knowledge of them: however, we have general, confused, indistinct notices, that all is not right within, as to the article of sins in some measure unsuspected; and this is the reason why we are averse to search out our spirits, lest we should find that to be too true, upon a mature examination, which we mistrusted upon a careless transient glance of thought. Just so it is in matters of belief. Where there is a moral certainty, any wrong affection may so far blind even a thinking man, that he shall not have a thorough and determined conviction of the truth; but he cannot shut out or suppress the evidences for it so entirely, as not to have a general distrust and an implicit suspicion, that he is in the wrong: which general distrust is the cause, that he is so unwilling to look into a book, which is written with great strength of reason on the other side, lest he should let in the enemy, truth, to disturb his repose.

There may be, however, some exceptions to what is here laid down. Men may have something particular in their temper: there is sometimes an unsuspected wrongness of understanding, which, because it does not discharge itself in raving, escapes the eye of common observers; but yet shall leaven a man's whole way of thinking: and it generally falls in with the reigning bent of the times. When the nation was in a ferment about religion, and for what was called a greater purity in it, it struck in with the general vogue of the age, and vented itself in all the extravagancies of fanaticism: but now, when things have taken a different turn, and irreligion is the prevailing mode, it has received a new determination from thence. Hence some are as distempered bigots for their no-religion, or what makes near approaches to none, as others were about a century ago for a farther reformation. Some persons who have travelled early into countries, where Popery is established, have had sense enough, in their younger years, to see through the gross impositions and cheats which are practised upon the vulgar. But not being able to separate religion itself

from the undue mixtures which were blended with it, they have unhappily contracted an aversion for all religion in general. They have associated with the idea of religion all those numerous tricks and fopperies which have passed there under its sacred cover. And the case of those who by this means, or by any other means similar to this, have conceived an early distaste for religion, resembles theirs, who have contracted an antipathy to some meats or liquors, however wholesome and nourishing, by reason of some bitter and unpalatable draughts or ingredients being mixed with them: the disagreeable idea always recurs, when they see them. This is certain, that offensive impressions, which have been given us of religion, learning, or any thing else in our tender years, before our minds come to a steadiness and consistency, are like those marks which are made upon the body of an animal in its mother's womb; they are seldom or never erased, but we carry them with us to the grave.

But whatever allowances we may make for insuperable prejudices, and invincible ignorance, in this case, and many others; it is a mistake to think, that Deists are less easy of belief than the rest of mankind. There may be a certain flock of faith, which we bring with us into the world; and as it has been observed of the affections, that if they be withheld from their natural gratifications, they will often discharge themselves on improper objects: just so, if men do not place their faith on suitable objects, they will not cease to be believers; they will misplace it on unsuitable ones; and whatever they want in a true Christian faith, they will more than make up in believing strange absurdities; of which numerous instances might be given both in the past and present times.

You may have bad books industriously thrown in your way: and you may have an imagination apt to startle at difficulties new to you. But if you have a turn for solid thinking and reasoning, bring your mind close to the difficulty, and make it take a near view of it on every side; and you will find, that what startled it at a distance, was only some idle trifle, which fancy had dressed up in a formidable shape. And if you have not, desire those who have studied the point, to turn to such passages in books already published

as contain a sufficient answer to it. For infidelity can only go round and round the same topics, in an eternal circle, without advancing one step further: it produces no new forces: it only brings those again into the field, which have been so often baffled, maimed, and disabled, that, in pity to them, they ought to be dismissed, and discharged from any further service.

You may complain, that you have not capacities sufficient for such things. Supposing your abilities so very slender, that you cannot perceive the truth of an historical fact well attested; yet one thing you may be sure of; that it is much better for the good of the whole, that mankind should abide by such a written rule of faith and practice, as the Christian is; than that they should be left every one, in low as well as high life, to collect a religion for themselves, just as their ignorance, passions, and prejudices, should mislead them. You may see, that this scheme, which is that of infidelity, would be destructive of the general happiness of the world: and you may conclude, that whatever scheme would, at the foot of the account, leave the world in a much worse state than it was before, in point of happiness, must be disagreeable to his will, who wishes the happiness of the world, and therefore contrary to truth. What better wish could the best-natured being form for the benefit of the world, than that the doctrines of Christianity, those strong incentives to virtue, should be universally believed, and its precepts universally practised?

II. From a right faith, I now proceed to what is, or ought to be, the consequence of it, a good life.

A good life is not one solitary and single virtue, however glaring; it is the combination and meeting together of all the moral and spiritual graces; just as light and whiteness is not one single colour and ray; it is the composition of all the colours and rays united and blended together.

Your first and leading duty is piety to God. And this takes in all religious duties, whether moral or positive; whether we fully and clearly see the reasons of them, or we see them dimly and indistinctly, or we do not see them at all; knowing this (enough for us to know), that an all-wise Being can injoin no duty, but for

wise ends and purposes; and an all-good Being can command no performance, but what is for our good and benefit.

Let not your piety break out in sudden short interrupted flashes, but let it shine on in one continued steady day-light. Have not just religion enough to make you uneasy; but enough to give you solid satisfaction; and a well-grounded assurance. Give God all you can: give him your heart—for that is all. And then, instead of contenting yourself with thinking, how holy and charitable you would be, if you had such a fortune, or were in such a station; you will never be easy, till you are as holy and charitable as it is possible for you to be, in whatever station you are, or whatever fortune you have.

But I have already discoursed often on this subject: one thing more however I beg leave to mention. You are, most of you, regular attendants on the service of the church: take care, that your deportment out of the church, be correspondent to your behaviour in it: otherwise you will do religion more disservice, than if you were its open and avowed enemies. For, pray observe, though piety be the most valuable thing in itself, the bulk of mankind are not capable of forming fine abstract ideas of it in itself; they must consider it, if at all, as it lies before them in the lives and conversation of men reputedly pious. And when they see those who have that character, laying stress upon trifles, as if the whole of religion consisted in them, and neglecting essentials; when they see them prying into the secrets of families, or encouraging and listening to those that do so, addicted to censoriousness and superciliousness; the little low despicable notions which they form of persons professing piety, they will unjustly annex to piety itself, and hold it ever after cheap and contemptible.

Secondly, Let therefore your piety to God be joined with, what ought to be inseparable from it, charity to man.

By charity, I do not mean only almsgiving, for that is only one branch of it, one outward expression of this duty; I mean the most liberal sentiments and the most enlarged affections towards all mankind. A charitable man will endeavour to see every thing through the mirror of good-nature, which mends and beautifies all objects, without altering any: like
fine

line painting, which, without deviating from nature, adds new touches and graces to it; it does not change, but only embellish it; it does not give a mere likeness, much less a woful likeness, it gives an agreeable and advantageous one. Far from surmising evil, where there is none, he will rather *think no evil*, where there really is; judging it better to err through a good-natured credulity, than through an undistinguishing suspicion; because a good-natured credulity will only expose him to some temporal inconveniences; but an undistinguishing suspicion will beget in him a settled uneasiness, jealousy, hatred, and the whole train of black passions, which will render his soul as dark as that hell, into which they will at last irrecoverably sink him.

To descend to particulars: First, A charitable man will never hate any body or community of men, provided there be nothing immoral in their profession, however he may dislike some individuals in it. Nothing is more unjust, though, I am afraid, nothing is more usual, than, if we have had to do with some wicked men of any fraternity, to cry out, *They are all become abominable*. Now, an undistinguishing censure upon a whole profession, for the faults of some few particular members, is generally a greater crime than any we can fix upon those few particular members; because it tends to bring an undeserved discredit upon a whole body of men, and thereby to lessen their usefulness. To commend a whole body in the gross, is an indication of a weak undistinguishing judgment; and to condemn it in the gross, of uncharitableness: human nature was never so good, but there were several worthless members of every profession; and never so bad, but there were several of distinguished worth in every condition of life. The scholar despises the man of business, and the man of business the scholar: now, what estranges men from each other, should, in the reason of the thing, mutually endear them: because the general good of the whole arises from the different pursuits of the several individuals: and if all men were to go the same way, and follow the same track of employment, it would cause a strange embarrassment: the road would be so much crowded, that none could get forward. Honour then *all men*, even those

of the meanest occupations: take in, with a comprehensive view, the whole chain of the rational world, where, though the links may be disproportioned in their size, yet the least serves to strengthen and support the greatest, and both, by depending upon, and aiding each other, keep the whole contexture from falling asunder.

Secondly, As you ought not to conceive a distaste for any man, or body of men, upon the account of a different profession; so neither should you, because they are of a different persuasion, sect, or party.

Supposing yourself in the right, you pity corporeal blindness: why should you not likewise compassionate, instead of being angry with, the blindness of the understanding, when it cannot discern certain religious truths? I know no reason but this, which resolves itself into pride, that the corporeally blind own themselves to be so; but the blind in understanding maintain, that we labour under that distemper, and not they. Now we are not so thoroughly convinced, that our understanding and way of thinking is perfectly right in all points, as that we have the full enjoyment of our eyesight: and this makes us so angry with the one, while we pity the other. Ensure your own salvation as much as you can, but do not think hardly of those who differ from you even in fundamental points, much less consign them over to damnation. Our blessed Saviour, who disapproved the worship of the Samaritans, as appears from his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, yet singles out, in his beautiful parable, one of that nation to do a generous action to the wounded traveller, on purpose, one would think, to obviate this contracted turn of mind, and to recommend those to our love, whose religious notions we dislike. Whether a good man, who is a misbeliever in some points, without any faultiness or irregularity of will, will be damned for his erroneous way of thinking, may be a question among some people; but I think it admits of none, that a man will be damned for an uncharitable way of thinking and acting.

Thirdly, You must not pass a hard precipitate censure upon a whole nation or country. *Can any thing good come out of Nazareth?* was a low, confined, ungenerous thought: goodness is not li-

mitted to, or excluded from, any place: the good are diffused throughout all nations, all sects, all persuasions, all ranks and orders of men. True charity ever dwells with a largeness of soul, which takes in all mankind, sincerely wishing, that all who are in any material error, may embrace the truth; and all that embrace it, may hold a pure faith in a pure conscience. And I question whether a generous-spirited way of thinking, a noble and exalted ardour of soul, with strong passions, which sometimes transport a man into exorbitances, be not, upon the whole, much more commendable, than an insipid regularity, and a flat correctness of life, which creeps on in one dull tenor, without ever overflowing; with too little spirit to reach any heights in virtue; too languid passions to be guilty of any flagrant vice: just as the critics have preferred the sublime in writing, with a great many inaccuracies and inequalities, to a middling style, though very faultless.

In short, true charity is to detest nothing but vice; and to despise nothing but contracted illiberal notions, which would confine God's favour, and most certainly limit our affections, within a narrow circle. Form as amiable sentiments at you can, of nations, communities of men, and individuals: if they are true, you do them only justice; if false, though your opinion does not alter their nature, and make them lovely, you yourself are more lovely, for entertaining such sentiments. When you feel the bright warmth of a temper thoroughly good in your own breast, you will see something good in every one about you. It is a mark of a littleness of spirit, to confine yourself to some minute part of a man's character: a man of generous, open, extended views, will grasp the whole of it; without which he cannot pass a right judgment on any part. He will not arraign a man's general conduct for two or three particular actions; as knowing that man is a changeable creature, and will not cease to be so, till he is united to that Being, who is *the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever*. He strives to outdo his friends in good offices, and overcome his enemies by them. He thinks he then receives the greatest injury, when he returns and revenges one: for then he is *overcome of evil*. Is the

person young who has injured him? he will reflect, that inexperience of the world, and a warmth of constitution, may betray his unpractised years into several inadvertencies, which a more advanced age, his own good sense, and the advice of a judicious friend, will correct and rectify. Is he old? the infirmities of age, and want of health, may have set an edge upon his spirits, and made him *speak unadvisedly with his lips*. Is he weak and ignorant? he considers, that it is a duty incumbent upon the wise to bear with those that are not so. *Ye suffer fools gladly*, says St. Paul, *seeing ye yourselves are wise*. In short, he judges of himself, as far as he can, with the strict rigour of justice; but of others, with all the softenings of humanity.

From charitable and benevolent thoughts, the transition is unavoidable to charitable actions. For wherever there is an inexhaustible fund of goodness at the heart, it will, under all the disadvantages of circumstances, exert itself in acts of substantial kindness. He that is substantially good will be doing good. The man that has a hearty determinate will to be charitable, will seldom put men off with the mere will for the deed. For a sincere desire to do good, implies some uneasiness till the thing be done: and uneasiness sets the mind at work, and puts it upon the stretch to find out a thousand ways and means of obliging, which will ever escape the unconcerned, the indifferent, and the unfeeling.

The most proper objects of your bounty are the necessitous. Give the same sum of money, which you bestow on a person in tolerable circumstances, to one in extreme poverty, and observe what a wide disproportion of happiness is produced. In the latter case, it is like giving a cordial to a fainting person; in the former, it is like giving wine to him who has already quenched his thirst. *Mercy is seasonable in time of affliction, like clouds of rain in the time of drought*.

And among the variety of necessitous objects, none have a better title to our compassion, than those, who, after having tasted the sweets of plenty, are, by some undeserved calamity, obliged, without some charitable relief, to drag out the remainder of life in misery and woe; who little thought they should ask their daily bread of any but of God; who,

who, after a life led in affluence, cannot dig, and are ashamed to beg. And they are to be relieved in such an endearing manner, with such a beauty of holiness, that, at the same time that their wants are supplied, their confusion of face may be prevented.

There is not an instance of this kind in history so affecting, as that beautiful one of Boaz to Ruth. He knew her family, and how she was reduced to the lowest ebb: when, therefore, she begged leave to glean in his fields, he ordered his reapers to let fall several handfuls with a seeming carelessness, but really with a set design, that she might gather them up without being ashamed. Thus did he form an artful scheme, that he might give, without the vanity and ostentation of giving; and she receive, without the shame and confusion of making acknowledgments. Take the history in the words of scripture, as it is recorded in the book of Ruth: *And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and rebuke her not: and let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose, and leave them that she may glean them, and reproach her not.* This was not only doing a good action; it was doing it likewise with a good grace.

It is not enough we do no harm; that we be negatively good; we must do good, positive good, if we would enter into life. When it would have been as good for the world, if such a man had never lived, it would perhaps have been better for him, if he had never been born. A scanty fortune may limit your beneficence, and confine it chiefly to the circle of your domestics, relations, and neighbours; but let your benevolence extend as far as thought can travel, to the utmost bounds of the world: just as it may be only in your power to beautify the spot of ground that lies near and close to you: but you could wish, that, as far as your eye can reach, the whole prospect before you was cheerful, that every thing disagreeable was removed, and every thing beautiful made more so.

I have dwelt so long upon this last virtue, that I have not time to discourse upon the rest. One duty, however, I shall just touch upon, which will engage us to performance of all the rest; and

that is, frequent self-examination, or self-reflection.

We need not look far to meet with persons, who, though they have a competent knowledge of the world, *know not what manner of spirit they are of*; condemning the want of charity in others, with all the acrimony, fierceness, and uncharitableness imaginable; censuring people for the defect of candour, and a sweetness of disposition, with that merciless keenness, and eagerness of spirit, which shews them to be, whatever others are, in the very gall of bitterness. Now, the use of such an observation, is not so much to arraign them, as to suspect yourself. For he never knew himself rightly, who never suspected himself. We seldom have that *charity which covers a multitude of faults* in our neighbours; and we much seldomer want that self-love, which covers a multitude of faults in ourselves. The truth is, the bulk of mankind do not reflect upon what they do: there could not be so many unkind things said or done, and so many kind ones omitted by those, who are not void of a sense of religion, if they took a survey of every thing that passed. What is indeed notorious, extraordinary, and out of the common road, in our conduct, will engage our attention: for what is notorious, and glaring, forces itself upon our observation: but upon what is common, ordinary, and frequent, in our intercourse with one another, we seldom reflect at all, or at least very transiently. Single acts of sin may be owing to some violent fall of passion; but a continued course of sinning, in any one instance, must be owing to self-deceit, occasioned by want of self-reflection, or to the delusive hopes of repenting some time or other. For a man cannot otherwise constantly allow himself, in the practice of what he constantly condemns. Without self-reflection, a man may have every vice under the sun, without knowing he has any; provided he has it not in a high degree.

Consider not what the world thinks of such a crime, but what it is in itself. For the world, in matters of opinion, is swayed more by authority than argument; in matters of practice, by example than rule; and in few things is governed by pure reason only. Are

you as apprehensive of a mistake, as cautious not to take wrong measures, as vigilant and circumspect in your grand concernment, your eternal welfare, as you would be in cases on which your life and fortune depended? If you are, you will seldom act amiss: if you are not, you shew that a worldly temper prevails more with you, than the hopes of God's favour, and the desire of salvation. Many excellent books are written, many weekly lectures are continually founding in our ears, with all the strength of reasoning, and beauty of eloquence, to persuade us to—what? one would think it should be something seemingly hurtful and disadvantageous to us.—No; no such thing. It is only to persuade us, what, one would think, is no difficult matter, and yet is the most difficult of all, that we would not make ourselves eternally miserable, that we would endeavour after eternal happiness. For one that perishes for want of knowing his duty, there are numbers, who are lost for ever, for want of seriously considering it, and laying it to heart. But I am persuaded better things of you, my brethren; you will reflect, that, if there be not another world, there is scarce any thing worth living for here; and if there be, our main concern in this is to fit ourselves for that.

III. But this brings me, lastly, to conclude with a short address to you.

It signifies little what notions a person, so obscure and undistinguished as I am, entertain: but since several persons have been, without just grounds, suspected of believing differently from what they profess, and to have an inward doctrine, which they reserve to themselves, or communicate only to some few select friends; I here declare, in the presence of God, that I am fully persuaded of the truth of Christianity, and the important doctrines thereof, which I have, during the space of nine years, oft inculcated to you; that I choose to live, and hope to die, in that persuasion; that, after having read the most considerable books that have been written against it, I do not know any objection, but what has received repeated and satisfactory answers. A thorough Christian in principle, I wish I was as good a one in my practice: and then I should, in some measure, deserve that approbation with which you have honoured me.

I heartily thank you, that you have candidly overlooked my numerous defects, kindly accepted my well-meant endeavours to serve you, both from the desk and from the pulpit; and, what is more, generously encouraged them. And to your other obligations, which you have conferred on me, be pleased to add this, which will be the greatest obligation of all, viz. to make me, in some degree, instrumental to your salvation, by deliberately weighing what I have laid down.

They are the last words of a departing, though not a dying, friend; and let them therefore make a suitable impression. Quit not your religion, your trust in God, your virtue, for any pleasure or profit which this world can give, for the world itself may give, for the profit and pleasure this world can give, this world itself may shortly be nothing to you: but religion and virtue will make you happy, when life's idle employments, and its idler follies, when the world, when time, shall be no more. False friends will forsake you, and true friends may either leave you through necessary avocations, or they may be divided from you by death: false friends will stand afar off in the day of trouble, and even true friends can, in some cases, stand only looking upon your misery, afflicted indeed in all your affliction, but without any power to ease your calamities: but God is a present friend, infinitely powerful and good, in all cases, at all times, in all places; he is able to hear us, wheresoever dispersed; and to relieve us, howsoever distressed: almost every thing may separate us from other friends; but *neither life nor death, nor principalities nor powers*, nothing but sin, can separate us from him, and the blessed influences of his presence.

Some there have been here, and some there are here, to whom I am in a particular manner indebted; from whom I have received obligations much greater than my expectations, and only not so great as their enlarged souls and generous inclinations to do me good.—Some, of whom almost every one speaks well; and few or none can speak so well as they deserve. It is a pleasure even to be obliged to persons of their turn, *who give liberally, and upbraid not*; a pleasure only not so affecting as that (which is beyond my abilities) of obliging them.

Injuries

Injuries I do not remember that I have received any from any of this place : and for whatever kindnesses you have done me, may God reward you sevenfold into your bosom. And I do not question but he will reward you : for they were designed to cherish and countenance worth and learning, though bestowed on me. My relation to you, as a pastor and teacher, is now upon the point of expiring ; but there is one relation, which will always subsist, and that is, of your affectionate and sincere wellwisher : whatever distance of place may be between us, I shall rejoice to hear of any good that befalls you, and be heartily sorry for any disaster that affects you. My prayers,

my best wishes (alas ! what can I say or do more ?) shall always be yours : for I am still yours sincerely in all good and Christian offices.

Finally, farewell, my brethren ; to God's grace I commend you. May he grant you everlasting welfare, and as much health and prosperity as are consistent with your everlasting welfare ! May your souls, while you live, improve in every Christian grace ; and when ye die, may they be presented without spot before the throne of grace ! May God protect you by his power, guide you with his counsel through the several stages of life, and after that receive you into glory !

SECTION VI.

FROM THE

SERMONS of JOHN BALGUY, M. A. Vicar of
NORTH ALLERTON, in the County of York, and Prebendary of Sarum,

SERMON I.

Connection between Duty and Happiness.

JOHN, xiii. 17.

If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

WHAT our blessed Saviour here observes to his disciples concerning some particular doctrines and duties, is justly applicable to all Christians in respect of their whole duty. Knowledge without practice will turn to small account; but where they are joined, and go hand in hand, they cannot fail of producing happy effects in proportion to the degree and extent of them. Yet, alas! a great part of mankind, even among Christians, are very deficient and backward in both. Many refuse knowledge, and choose to live in ignorance; and many will not be persuaded to practise what they do know. Their minds are so much employed, and their thoughts taken up, with the concerns of the body, that they have neither leisure nor inclination to take care of the soul. They have many things to provide more agreeable than knowledge; and, as they imagine, more useful and substantial. They are apt to suppose, that as much knowledge as they have occasion for will naturally come in, as it were, by the bye, without application, or loss of time; and what truth they do happen to meet with, is commonly soon thrown aside into some corner of the mind, where it lies neglected and disregarded like unprofitable lumber. But besides those impediments to knowledge arising from indolence, or secular cares, or sensual avo-

cations; others are frequently produced by men's prejudices, and partial ways of thinking. Even in very plain cases, it is often a difficult matter to convince a man of his duty, or his interest. Bring him the strongest proofs, and set them in the clearest light; yet they shall not be able to gain his assent; and, perhaps, not move him at all. Some secret inclination, some darling appetite, shall bribe his judgment, or spread a mist over his understanding. Hence it is that truth and evidence lose their native influence, and so often fail of success. But however hard it may be to convince men of their duty, it is much harder to prevail with them to practise it. The same corrupt affections which bias their understandings, shall take faster hold of their wills, and make them absolutely reject what they see and own is both reasonable and beneficial. Their lusts and passions have more influence, and more authority, than all the motives that can be drawn either from reason, or interest. Let *evidence* itself cry aloud, and understanding put forth her voice; yet men will either not hear it, or not regard it. In numberless cases they see plainly what is just, and right, and good; and yet obstinately refuse to submit to it. Conscious of great blame, and desperate folly, they persist in evil-doing; and bear up, as well as they can, under all the reproaches of their own minds.

It is then, and ever has been, one of the greatest difficulties in the world, to reconcile men's wills and understandings, and prevail with them to do what they know ought to be done. As it is most absurd to imagine, that God should force those creatures whom he has made free; so it is a plain contradiction in itself, that

men should be driven into virtue, and made good by compulsion; since nothing can possibly be good or virtuous that is not the result of free choice. Without a power of doing ill, they could have no power of doing well; and indeed would be no agents at all. Nothing more therefore could be done, consistently with man's nature, than setting before him proper motives and powerful inducements. And what more proper, or more likely to succeed, than that in my text? There we learn that our welfare and our happiness depend on our conduct, and are inseparably connected with the discharge of our duty. And however regardless we may be of reason and truth, yet while we have any sensibility, we must desire to be happy. This is a principle which we can never quit, be we never so heedless or inconstant in our pursuits. In short, if this consideration will not work upon us, our case is desperate, and we shall inevitably perish in our own folly. Heaven and earth can yield no remedy to an obstinate, hardened, and incorrigible state of mind.

But, to proceed: Nothing can better deserve our thoughts and meditations, than that connexion between duty and happiness set forth in my text. Both reason and revelation expressly inform us, that well-being is the consequence of well-doing; and that from the very natures of things, as well as divine appointment. It has often been observed, and can never be too often considered, that virtue is the very same thing to the mind that health is to the body; and by consequence, that every vice is a real distemper, and a preternatural affection.—And how remarkable is the resemblance and coincidence of their diseases! What is violent anger and rage, but a fever of the mind, attended with an inflammation of the blood and spirits? What is envy, but a consumptive passion, that preys on men's vitals, and emaciates both mind and body? What is intemperance, but a slow poison at best, and oftentimes not slow? What is discontent and wandering desire, but sickness of appetite, which catches at every thing, and relishes nothing? What are avarice and ambition, but dropical habits of mind; which oppress it with a load of humours, and excite an unquenchable thirst? In fine, what is a sensual voluptuous course of

life, but a general surfeit of the whole man, or a complication of distempers, that hurries him on swiftly to death and destruction? To expect happiness, or propose any considerable enjoyment, while the mind is thus disordered, and its constitution thus broken, is just as reasonable as it would be to form schemes of pleasure when a man was weighed down with infirmities and diseases, and had one foot in the grave. In like manner, to pretend or promise ourselves such a state under the bondage of sin, and the tyranny of evil habits; while the appetites bear sway, and the passions domineer without control; is no better than the prospects of a man in a dungeon, or the dreams of a galley-slave. Nay it is worse and more hopeless; because no confinement, no slavery of the body, is equal to the bondage of the mind. No irons, no chains, can press so closely, or gall so cruelly, as the fetters of sin; which corrode the very substance of the soul, and fret every faculty.

The foundation of all happiness is a quiet, serene, and composed mind; free from the storms of passion, and the turbulence of unruly desires: where reason sits at the helm, and keeps the instincts and inclinations in due subjection, and right order. Whenever this is not the case, in a good measure at least, true satisfaction is an impossible thing, and happiness a mere chimera. And indeed, since *there is no peace to the wicked*; since they are justly compared to *the troubled sea when it cannot rest*; how should any real happiness fall to their share? How should a few broken starts of pleasure, poor transient sensations, make amends for those numberless inquietudes, vexations, and distractions, which the unhappy sinner is sure to undergo? Considering the endless hurry of his actions and passions; the tumults and agitations of his spirits; the variety and insatiableness of his desires; the terror of his apprehensions, and the torment of his fears: considering, I say, these and the like circumstances, who can imagine there is any chance for happiness? As well might a man take pleasure in a tempest, or enjoy himself in a whirlwind, as find true satisfaction amidst the disorders of sin, and the confusions and madnesses of a wicked life. But with the virtuous man the case is far otherwise. He is sure

to possess that tranquillity of mind which is the spring of all comforts, and, at least, the root of all felicity. Whatever accidents may incommode him from without, he enjoys a perpetual calm within: his appetites are tractable, his affections cool, and his desires moderate: he reflects quietly, and acts sedately: his contemplations are pleasing, his hopes lively, and his prospects delightful. In a word, his mind is at ease, and his heart at rest; and he feels it to be true, that *the fruits of righteousness are peace*; and *the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever*.

But, further: By doing well, and discharging his duty, a man not only avoids that trouble and vexation which is inseparable from a vicious course of life; but obtains real pleasure and solid enjoyment. As a man may sin himself into such a situation, that he dare scarce either look at himself, or think of himself; every reflection giving him pain, and every recollection shame and remorse: so by good deeds, and virtuous habits, he may improve his mind to such a degree, as to find joy and happiness springing up continually within his own breast, and become highly satisfied from himself. Whenever the virtuous man looks inward, he has the comfort to behold fair ideas, and pure affections; amiable intentions, and worthy actions. He has the pleasure of perceiving many virtues of his own planting; many graces of his own cherishing. His conscience presents him with more agreeable sights, and delightful objects, than he can any where find without him through all the works of art and nature. Truth, probity, integrity, fidelity, benevolence, mercy, charity towards men, with humble reverence, gratitude, and piety towards God; as they are in themselves most lovely, and most excellent; so they must needs make a delightful appearance in the eye of the possessor. The noblest views, and finest prospects, upon the face of the earth, cannot equal the charms of this moral landscape.—A corrupt and vicious heart may be compared to a wilderness overrun with weeds, thorns, and briars, and full of adders, scorpions, and venomous beasts; for every sin sheds poison, and every vice carries a deadly sting. But the mind of a good man is like the garden of Eden, fair and flourishing, regular and

beautiful; well cultivated, and richly covered; abounding in all the sweets of peace, the freshness of innocence, and the fragrance of good works: where the fruits of righteousness are blooming on every side; and virtue, like the tree of life, bears health, and vigour, and immortality.—In short, to live righteously, and persevere in well-doing, is gathering a stock of the truest enjoyments: it is pleasure in the act, and joy in the remembrance: it affords at all times comfortable thoughts, pleasing reflections, delightful hopes, and blessed prospects.

But it is further to be considered, that as innocence and virtue many ways redound to men's satisfaction, and gratify the mind with a great variety of the purest enjoyments; so they procure it, what nothing else can, the Divine esteem and approbation. Conscience is God's deputy and viceroy; and whatever sentence it really passes, is ratified in heaven. Whoever therefore enjoys this testimony, is secure of his Maker's approbation. And what can be more agreeable to a wise man, than to know and consider that his conduct is approved by Infinite Wisdom? Men may deceive each other by dissimulation and flattery; may commend with their lips what they condemn in their hearts: and supposing them sincere, yet in many cases they are very apt to misjudge, and be mistaken. And these are confessedly great drawbacks on human applause, and diminutions of all earthly fame. But our Supreme Judge can neither deceive, nor be deceived: with Him, as there is no possibility of error, so there is no partiality nor respect of persons: nor can he approve of any thing, but in proportion to its real worth. Whatever therefore is valuable and acceptable in his sight, is most infallibly good and amiable in itself. If then the praise of men appears desirable, what must we think of the praise of God? If true glory be the object of our ambition, here must we seek for it; for here, and here only, is it to be found in perfection. Not to mention at present the good effects and blessed consequences of God's approbation, let us only consider it in itself; and we must necessarily conclude it to be the highest and most exalted pitch of honour that either men or angels are capable of enjoying. Now this noble, this sublime, privilege is one of the

the peculiar appendages of virtue. For as true virtue can never fall short of it, so nothing else in the whole world can possibly procure it. No wealth can purchase it, no power extort it, no knowledge give a title to it. No pretences or professions, no entreaties or importunities, can avail any thing towards it. Whatever we may know, whatever we may say, whatever we may do, besides our duty; are all, in this respect, ineffectual, unprofitable, worthless.—

Among the natural advantages of well-doing, I might also insist on those secular comforts which virtue often procures, and always promotes: I might proceed to shew how it influences all the blessings of life, and directly conduces to every branch of worldly prosperity. But these subjects being too copious and extensive for our present inquiry, must at this time be omitted.

I shall therefore go on to consider the second ground of that happiness which is ascribed to the practice of virtue; namely, the will of Heaven, and the appointments of divine wisdom. The discharge of our duty tends to our happiness not only in a natural, but a supernatural way. Great and manifold blessings are annexed thereto by the designations of Providence. And what wonder that we find it so ordained? What wonder if the all-wise and all-righteous Governor of the world effectually maintain those distinctions which are founded on eternal truth, and essentially depend on the very natures of things. The difference and opposition between light and darkness, are not greater than those between virtue and vice. The one is intrinsically vile, base, and odious; the other ever amiable, worthy, and good. Iniquity is, in itself, a proper object of displeasure and resentment; and righteousness as proper an object of esteem and favour. To punish therefore the one, and reward the other, is only acting according to truth and nature; and, by consequence, what must ever be expected from the rectitude and holiness of the supreme Judge; who, as He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity without marks of indignation, so He cannot fail finally to protect innocence, and give all due encouragement to virtue and goodness.

On this account then it is God's will and pleasure, and his unchangeable de-

cree, that misery shall be the portion of the wicked, and happiness of the righteous; if not here in this world, yet hereafter most assuredly in the next. Even in this world, though it be not the place of retribution, virtue is far from being overlooked. On many occasions, and in several respects, good men enjoy the present favour and countenance of Heaven. A secret blessing attends their steps, and guides their feet into the paths of success. And whenever, in outward appearance, it proves otherwise, they are only disappointed to their own advantage. For all events are directed in their favour, and *all things work together for their good*. In reality, *whatsoever the righteous man doth, it shall prosper*. That is, he shall either succeed in his own way, or in a better; either accomplish his own designs, or be conducted more surely by the unerring hand of Providence.—Whatever be his share of outward advantages, he is inwardly blessed in a peculiar manner. That divine peace which passeth all understanding, is continually shed abroad in his heart. Those spiritual joys and consolations which descend from above, like the dews of heaven, are the recruits of his soul, and the refreshments of his spirit. The natural delights of virtue are heightened and improved by supernatural comforts and divine benedictions.

But, after all, though the practice of virtue be thus beneficial, and thus satisfactory, even in this life; though it give some degrees of happiness in hand; yet it promises and procures infinitely greater in reversion. The comforts and blessings of good men here below are quite inconsiderable, when compared with that mighty good which is provided for them hereafter: at most, only small tokens of God's love, and pledges of his favour; to assure them of his intentions, and give them some little sentiment of the joys of immortality. Experience has shown us how great a difference there is between the toys and amusements of childhood, and the manly entertainments of a riper age. But the disproportion is vastly greater between the two states that we are speaking of. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so much do things temporal fall short of things eternal. We have no words to express the joys and glories of a blessed immortality;

talities; scarce any ideas to think of them. The apostle, though admitted to a glimpse thereof, yet pronounces them beyond his utterance, and even above all human conception.

Nevertheless, this we know and are assured concerning that state; it will be entirely free from all pain and grief; from all tears and sorrows; from every sort of affliction, and every shadow of adversity; there will be no danger, no possibility of receiving injuries, either from men, or the powers of darkness; there will be no violence, hatred, or hostility; no strife, discord, or disaffection; no fraud, falsehood, dissimulation, or treachery: but, on the contrary, truth, peace, harmony, joy, benevolence, unfeigned love and universal charity will prevail throughout; fill every breast, and overflow the regions of bliss. There virtue will appear in all its charms, and operate every way with full force; shining outward in every grace and glory that either itself shall produce, or Heaven confer; and shedding inward perfect complacency, and transport unspeakable. The society will consist of *just men made perfect*, and angels more perfect; of the best and wisest of our species, and the most excellent of theirs. At the head of both will appear our Mediator and Redeemer, in full triumph over all his enemies and ours; possessed of all power, dominion, and glory; rejoicing over the purchase of his sufferings, the fruits of his goodness, and the trophies of his love.—How will the faculties of the righteous be then enlarged! and what an amazing scene of objects ready to employ them! what depths of knowledge! what displays of wisdom! what manifestations of truth and equity! when the works of the creation, and the wonders of the universe; the difficulties of Providence, and the dispensations of grace, shall be laid open to their view, and set in the clearest and strongest light; and, what is infinitely more, when the blessed Deity himself, the incomprehensible Majesty of heaven and earth, shall be revealed to sight, as far as created minds are capable of such an object; when He shall exhibit his light and truth, and communicate the glories and perfections of his nature, without intermission, without measure, and without end: then will it be known what that happiness is,

which is the fruit of righteousness, and the reward of well-doing.

If then *we know these things, happy are we if we do* what is necessary to obtain them. And what should we not do, what should we not undertake, in order to gain so vast a good? If such an interest, so inestimable a prize as this, cannot influence our minds, and excite our affections, let us give up all pretensions to reason, and abandon ourselves to sense and appetite like the creatures below us. How can we pretend to any degree of wisdom, or even common understanding, if we undervalue the treasures of Heaven, and the joys and glories of immortality? or if we prefer before them the low pleasures, the little delights, the momentary enjoyments, of sin and sense? Can vice yield any good that is either durable or solid? can it afford any thing comparable to the effects and rewards of virtue? Are not the calm and steady beams of the sun more to be desired than short flashes of lightning? For thus may we compare the satisfactions of innocence, and the gratifications of sin. The one are safe and serene, pure and perpetual; the other transient and broken, dangerous and deadly.

A full knowledge of our duty is so far from being sufficient without practice, so far from excusing the want of it, that, in a great measure, it is the very thing which renders us inexcusable. According to the equitable rule of the gospel, the better *we know our Lord's will, and do it not*, the more stripes, and the severer punishment, must we expect. *For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.* And this, we are sensible, is the case of Christians in a peculiar degree; who, unless they wilfully shut their eyes, are enlightened far beyond the rest of mankind; and, by consequence, their obligations to well-doing must be so much stronger in proportion, and their future happiness or misery conformable thereto. This we should carefully and constantly keep in mind; not considering the laws of Heaven as subjects for speculation, or discourse; but as practical precepts, and the grand rule of life. Vain is that religion which floats in the head, and evaporates in thoughts or words. That only is real, which descends into the heart, and moves the springs of action; producing virtuous deeds,

deeds, and engaging men in the service of God and goodness.

Upon the whole, if we neglect to know the great duties of life, and the obligations of virtue and religion, our understandings are given us to no purpose. And if, knowing them, we refuse to practise them, how shall we answer it either to God, or to ourselves? or *how* think to escape, if we neglect so great salvation? What extreme folly must it be to reject such great promises, and give up such glorious prospects, for the sake of dreams and shadows! For certainly the best fruits and rewards of sin ought to be reputed nothing better. *Life and death, blessing and cursing*, are before us; and on the choice that we now make, depends our condition and success for ever. Let us not then *trust in vanity, lest vanity be our recompense*. Let us not trust to the flattering insinuations of a vicious course, lest perdition be our lot, and inevitable misery our doom. On the contrary, let us follow the things which make for our eternal peace and prosperity. If we know and approve the things that are excellent, let us act accordingly; cleaving to that which is good, habitually and stedfastly, to our lives end.

SERMON II.

Diversity of Opinion, no just Cause of Discord.

JOHN, iv, 9.

For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.

THE disagreement between the Jews and the Samaritans, occasioned by different sentiments of religion, and different places of divine worship, was raised to such a height, as to break off, in a great measure, all intercourse between them, and put a stop to the offices of common humanity. Excepting the case of commerce, tolerated by consent, they mutually avoided correspondence, and treated each other as barbarians, or something worse.—Hence we find the woman of Samaria in no little surprise, that our Saviour, being a Jew, should apply to her for water to drink. Accordingly she expostulates the matter with him, and inquires how it came to pass:

How is it, says she, that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me who am a woman of Samaria? adding, in the words of my text, *for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.*—In discoursing whereof, it is not my intention to enlarge on this particular case; but rather to take an occasion from hence of considering that general propensity in mankind which produced it, and which we find continually operating in the same way, in all times and places, and even among Christians; though discountenanced and condemned by the first principles, and clearest precepts, both of reason and revelation. The propensity which I speak of is, that of men's breaking loose from the bonds of humanity, and cherishing discord and disaffection, merely on account of differences of opinion, especially in matters of religion. In general, nothing is more frequent and familiar, than to observe what animosities are daily kindled by the opposition of men's sentiments and speculations. But in respect of religious ones, the effect is notorious, and the grievance almost universal. Whatever be the meaning of it, we seem all to expect that others should think as we do, and subscribe to our principles and persuasions. And whenever this expectation fails, as fail it must perpetually, our affection is apt to cool, and our good-will to abate, in proportion to the difference. Whoever judges in his own way, and rejects ours, is, at least, looked upon with a suspicious eye, and forfeits some share of our esteem. But very often he becomes an object of our high displeasure, and is numbered among our worst enemies: without any other offence given, than thinking differently from us, and following the conclusions of his own understanding, he grows so very obnoxious, that we oftentimes shun him, and refuse to have any dealings with him.—Instead, therefore, of confining our thoughts to the particular fact spoken of in my text, it may be proper to extend them to all that are of the like nature. Such an inhuman way of proceeding being general and common, should be considered and treated of accordingly. Since men of all religions are more or less faulty in this respect, as well as Jews and Samaritans: instead of pointing our censures at them, it behoves us all to take part of the blame; to plead guilty ourselves, and provide,

provide, if possible, a suitable remedy. — I shall therefore endeavour in the

First place, To give some account of this strange appearance.

Secondly, To shew the unreasonableness and iniquity of such a proceeding. And,

Thirdly, To take notice of the pernicious consequences which flow from it.

First, I am to give some account of this strange appearance. For, indeed, however common it be, it is a strange one; as we must acknowledge, if we fairly consider it. We are offended at our brethren; think and speak ill of them; and practise hostilities against them. Why, what have they done? They have, it seems, presumed to differ from us in opinion, and followed their own judgments instead of ours. Does this reason deserve the name of a reason? Is it not rather a most ridiculous pretence; and does it not appear such at first sight? But of this more afterwards. In the mean time, let us briefly inquire into the true cause of this proceeding. For unless we discover the cause, it will be in vain to think of a cure. — On what grounds then can we fix it, or to what principle ascribe it? Is it owing to our love of truth, and our zeal and concern for the support of it? Such a principle, if sincere and genuine, would operate a quite contrary way. Admitting our opinions to be as just and true, as we suppose them to be, how are they to be maintained, promoted, and propagated? By ill-will or good-will; by hatred or love; by injuries and reproaches, or kind usage and gentle treatment? If we would recommend our opinions effectually, we must procure them a fair hearing: and in order thereto, must appear well-affected to those whom we are endeavouring to convince. If, on the contrary, we discover any signs of enmity and disaffection, will not men be naturally prejudiced against all the arguments that we can urge? Will they not suspect, and that justly, that we are influenced by motives very different from what we pretend? In short, whoever has a real regard for truth, and is desirous to promote its interests, must and will follow methods quite contrary to what we are speaking of. He will find it necessary to correspond with men of different persuasions fairly and friendly and, in all his dealings, to pro-

ceed with humanity, equity, and candour. He will be so far from exasperating their minds by malevolence or contempt, that he will strive to conciliate their good-will, and cultivate their esteem, by a willing discharge of all such good offices as may reasonably be expected from him. This plea then is a mere pretence; and can never be thought sufficient either to justify such a practice, or account for it. — Can it then be any way referred to a pious concern for the glory of God? May we suppose that men are impatient of opposition, and zealous for their opinions, from a strict regard for the doctrines of religion, and in order to preserve them in their original purity? However this may be alleged, it seems very difficult to find the connexion. Let the pure doctrines of religion by all means be guarded and maintained as carefully as may be: but how is this to be done? Will animosity go further than argument, or reproaches have a better effect than fair reasoning? If we judge that our neighbour has erred and strayed from the paths of truth, must we needs fall out with him, in order to reduce him? Will our treating him angrily or scornfully make him more attentive to instruction, or more open to conviction? Will he not rather be apt to conclude, that our passions and dispositions are more faulty than his faith, and more irregular than his judgment? As the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God, so it is the most improper instrument in the world for the maintenance of his truth. So far is it from being conducive to the support and protection of sound doctrine, that it is much more likely to shake and subvert it. And, supposing it otherwise, it is at best a very hard supposition, that God should ever be glorified by such measures as are repugnant to charity and humanity, and contrary to the principles both of nature and religion. But indeed such a conduct answers neither purpose; as being no less injurious to truth, than it is to peace and good-will. — And as to the advancement of public good, there can be no room at all for such a pretence. So far from it, that the very reverse must naturally follow; as I shall have occasion to observe under another head. To promote and propagate what we believe to be truth by amicable methods, is undoubtedly a real service to the public; but strife, and variance,

riance, and uncharitable proceedings, are the very bane of human society. Since then the behaviour we are speaking of is not to be accounted for by the fore-mentioned suppositions, where shall we search for the true source of it? To what cause, or what principle, may it justly be ascribed? To none, I fear, that is praiseworthy, or even innocent: nay, to none but what is highly blameable, and what we are, or ought to be, greatly ashamed of. For the plain truth is, that it springs from pride, vanity, and immoderate self-love: nothing else is sufficient to account for it, or capable of producing it. Being swelled with a high conceit of our own opinions, because they are our own, our attachment to them becomes so strong, that every opposition is apt to give us pain, and become an object of our displeasure. We look upon it as an offence, and an injury; and too often resent it accordingly. Hence, in a great measure, proceed those rigorous judgments, and rugged dealings, which have so often appeared even among Christians; to the dishonour of our holy religion, and indeed the reproach of human nature. An intemperate fondness for our own notions, set off and sanctified by specious names, has not only laid waste our charity, but often made us violate the first principles of humanity and common justice. This will further appear, if we go on to consider, in the

Second place, The unreasonableness and iniquity of such a proceeding. By the law of nature, by all the rules of reason and religion, every man has a right to our good-will; of which right nothing can ever deprive him, whatever his character or conduct may be. And not only to our good-will is he entitled, but even to our esteem; till he forfeit it by misbehaviour and demerit. If we entertain a hard thought, an unfavourable opinion, of any man, without grounds, we are manifestly unjust and injurious. Let it then be considered whether any disagreements or differences of opinion be a just ground for dislike, a real forfeiture of our esteem. Now this is so far from being true, that it is utterly impossible. And the reason is, because no man's opinions or persuasions are in his own power, or subject to his will. He must believe as he can; and is under a necessity of judging, if he judge at all, according as

the evidence of things appears to him. He may indeed misapply and pervert his faculties; so may we: but in either case this is impossible to be known, excepting by God and a man's own conscience. Supposing then, what ought always to be supposed in such a case, that other men use their faculties, and exercise their judgments, as fairly and uprightly as we do; they may still differ from us, and perhaps widely: I ask, what is the offence, or where shall we fix the blame? Shall we accuse men of faults not voluntary; or lay to their charge things unavoidable? Are men to answer for those operations of the mind wherein they are entirely passive; and which they can no more alter than they can change the very frame of their nature? If they have carefully sought the truth, and sincerely followed the best light they could get, they are innocent in the sight of God, and even secure of his acceptance, whatever errors they may have fallen into. But men, it seems, are not so easily satisfied: so hard and unreasonable we are, that we take offence, where none is either given or meant. If our neighbour's thoughts are not as our thoughts, and his principles conformable to ours; he incurs our ill opinion, our indignation, our censures: we condemn him oftentimes without mercy, and would punish him if we could. Has he done us any wrong, or committed any fault at all? Not any; and in truth, we might as well, and with as good reason, quarrel with him for the difference of his looks and features, as the difference of his opinions. Both are alike involuntary, and entirely out of his power and choice.—But further; let us suppose that it was in his power to come into our way of thinking; why should he not use his own liberty as well as we? He differs no more from us, than we do from him: and, by consequence, if there be any fault committed, any offence made, it is mutual, and belongs to both alike. He has as good a right to direct and dictate to us, as we to him; or if our pretensions reach any further, we should make out our claim. Do we pretend to set up our sentiments as a common standard? Or would we, in resemblance of a noted tyrant, reduce all men's understandings to the model and measure of our own? If we presume, and take it for granted, that we are in the right, and others in the

wrong,

wrong, what hinders them from making the same supposition in favour of themselves? And whether it be made by one or the other, assurance and confidence are by no means certain marks of truth. But let it be supposed that truth actually is on our side; what follows? Only this; that till other men are convinced of it, we cannot expect their concurrence. And in order to convince them, let any man judge whether cool arguments, and candid instructions, be not much more likely means, than either bitter reproaches, or contemptuous neglect.—But does not the scripture seem to countenance severe and rigorous proceedings, in respect of those who corrupt the doctrines of religion? Are we not required to *mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the apostolic doctrine?* And *if any come and bring not such doctrine*; are we not expressly forbid to receive them, or even shew them common civilities? I answer, that if the persons here spoken of had been only chargeable with erroneous opinions, and false doctrines; and their characters clear in other respects; these directions about them would not easily have been accounted for. But the truth is, as the best interpreters allow, that their practice was as corrupt as their faith could be; and their conduct not only immoral, but infamous and profligate. The apostle expressly mentions their evil deeds; and there is good reason to believe that their misbehaviour was notorious. What wonder then if he warned the faithful against such licentious men, and would have them generally marked and discountenanced? But can any instance be produced, where persons of a good moral character are either treated by our Saviour or his Apostles, or ordered to be treated by others, with rigour and severity, merely on account of their errors, whether small or great? If no such instance is to be found, as may securely be affirmed, vain are all endeavours to seek patronage in the gospel for such proceedings as are directly contrary to the true spirit and design of it, as well as the tenor of its precepts. However the maintainers of immoral doctrines and wicked principles may be there branded, yet great lenity and indulgence are ever shewn to mere errors of judgment, and the mistakes of well-meaning men. In short, the disposition we are considering

is inhuman and unjust; and therefore is, and must be, equally condemned by reason and revelation. Nothing indeed is more opposite to the true genius of Christianity, or the example and practice of its great Author; whose gentleness and meekness were never to be exhausted by the most injurious actions; much less by involuntary failings, and invincible mistakes. Whenever we find his zeal exerted in sharp admonitions, and warm reproofs, we are sure there is real guilt, and that of the worst sort. But opinions and judgments simply erroneous never offended him; and we may safely say, never will. The

Third particular which I proposed, is briefly to take notice of the pernicious consequences of the practice here complained of; which, in the first place, may be considered as producing public evils of the highest malignity. To this has been owing a great share of those calamities and miseries which have so cruelly and constantly infested the Christian world. From this fountain have flowed not only bitter waters, but streams of blood in every age: inquisitions, persecutions, martyrdoms, murders, massacres, are, in a great measure, to be placed to the account of this intolerating, unchristian spirit. A considerable part of the best and worthiest of mankind have fallen victims to this barbarous principle; and most of our histories are blackened with the horrid cruelties occasioned by it. Even where it has operated in a milder and more moderate way, it has produced much mischief, and a great variety of troubles and inconveniencies. The chief blessings of society it has corrupted and poisoned; robbed men of their mutual affection, benevolence, and esteem; infused jealousies, kindled contentions, and spread variance and discord far wide: it has divided friends, families, kindred; crumbled communities into parties and factions; and burst asunder the strongest bonds and obligations, both natural, civil, and religious: in short, it has disturbed and damaged the public in numberless respects, and frequently introduced general disorder and confusion. Again; if we consider its private effects, and how it operates on the minds of those who harbour it, we shall find it no less mischievous and fatal within, than it is without. It perverts their understandings, corrupts

corrupts their judgments, and alienates their affections; it confounds their ideas of merit and demerit, and makes them estimate characters by false rules, and fallacious measures; it creates uneasy and vexatious sentiments, and sheds into their breasts the corroding venom of ill-will; it supplants men's graces and good dispositions, and plants evil habits in their room; it feeds that vanity from which it springs, and nourishes presumption, confidence, and self-conceit; in a word, it kills the kind instincts of humanity and compassion, and sometimes pulls them up by the very roots. And what enjoyment, what peace or tranquillity of mind is to be expected, where so malignant a principle has taken hold, and fixed itself to any depth? A principle so unnatural and perverse; so injurious to virtue, and, by consequence, destructive of happiness; that it may justly be looked upon as a great curse to its possessors, as well as to the public.—Lastly, a further evil attending it, is the discredit and dishonour which it does to religion; against which many men are easily prejudiced; and perhaps no way more, or sooner, than this. Christianity, in particular, ever suffers, and that greatly, through this very misconduct. Candour and charity are the chief characteristic of Christians; their peculiar ornament, and noblest distinction. And whenever it is sacrificed to mere opinions, and points of speculation; the blame is apt to be misapplied and transferred, and the profession itself charged with the faults and follies of its professors. The gospel grants all due freedom, and every innocent liberty; and not only so, but requires men to stand fast therein. On the contrary, many Christians provide chains and fetters, and oblige men to put them on. Let the adversaries of our religion consider how they direct their accusation, and fix their charge: most evident it is how they ought to fix it. Private judgment is not only our privilege, but our duty; not only permitted, but enjoined by Christ and his Apostles. What dishonour then, what indignity do Christians offer to their sacred institution, when, instead of encouraging private judgment, they pluck it out of men's hands, and place implicit faith in its room! When, instead of leaving them at liberty to interpret scripture, and judge for themselves, they tie them down to the doc-

trines and explications of frail and fallible guides!

Upon the whole; if we have any regard to plain reason, and natural equity; if we wish peace and prosperity either to our fellow-creatures, or ourselves; if we have any concern for the glory of God, and the honour of his dispensations; let us not presume to exercise dominion over other men's faith, or take any steps towards oppressing their understandings, or impairing their liberties. Let us grudge no man the possession of those rights which nature has given him, and the gospel has confirmed to him; ever remembering that divine rule, of *dealing with others, as we would be dealt with ourselves*. In order hereto, let us carefully guard against all excesses and irregularities of self-love, resist the impulses of vanity, and check betimes the desires of domination. Let the love of equity and probity prevail in our minds, and let us maintain and cherish sobriety of thought, and humility of spirit. *Above all, let us put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness, the end of the commandment, and the very essence of the gospel.*

SERMON III.

Haman and Mordecai.

ESTHER, V. 13.

Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.

IN these words complained Haman the favourite of Ahasuerus the king of Persia. This powerful prince had raised him up from a mean estate to the highest rank and dignity; conferred on him peculiar honours, and distinguished him from all the nobles and princes of his court. In this exalted condition he was revered by all, excepting Mordecai the Jew; who resolutely declined the expected homage. To inquire after the cause of this singular disrespect, would be loss of time; as being a point of mere curiosity, and no consequence. Whatever Mordecai's reasons might be, we find Haman highly incensed at him. The indignity appeared so great, and the affront so heinous, that he was not content to mark out the offender alone as an object of vengeance. This he judged not sufficient satisfaction; and

and therefore meditated a more ample revenge, by destroying all the Jews in the kingdom. This resolution, unjust and cruel as it was, was brought very near the point of execution; and would, in all probability, have been accomplished, had not Providence remarkably interposed, and turned the intended ruin on his own head.

From hence we might take a proper occasion of considering the miserable influences of pride and ambition; which intoxicate men's minds with high conceits, make them insolent and outrageous, and willing to burst all the bonds of humanity, on the slightest and most trivial occasions. They lose all patience, when any thing stands in their way, or tends to reduce those swelling ideas which they form of themselves. From hence, likewise, we might observe the pernicious effects of ungoverned rage; which, being once kindled, often mounts into a mighty flame, and spreads destruction far and wide. We may take notice, from the event of this history, of the justice and wisdom of divine Providence, which confounds the devices of the crafty, and condemns them to fall into those very snares which they lay for others. Though this life be not properly a state of retribution, yet it affords many instances of vengeance providentially executed on those who give themselves up to unrighteous measures and inhuman practices. These and the like reflections might be drawn from the incidents of this historical passage. But I shall confine myself at present to the two following observations, which more immediately arise from the declaration in my text:

First, then, I observe, that however kind Providence may have been to us, it frequently happens that one single misfortune, and that too a gentle one, is sufficient to blast all our blessings; to make us insensible of God's goodness, and regardless of his benefits. We may read in the verses foregoing my text, what great honours and advantages Haman was possessed of. The glory of his riches; the multitude of his children; his promotion and advancement above the rest of the princes; in short, every distinction, every instance of favour, that he could wish, or the king confer. Yet, it seems, all this prosperity availed him nothing, while he had the mortification of being

slighted by Mordecai the Jew. We may wonder, perhaps, at such a turn and temper of mind, and even reflect on it with indignation and astonishment; never suspecting that we ourselves are ever chargeable with the like folly and extravagance. But if we examined our own hearts, we should sometimes discover too near a resemblance. Though we may not possess such an affluence, nor enjoy such dignities and distinctions, we may nevertheless be really prosperous in a lower sphere. We may share largely the favours of Providence, and boast a great variety of blessings: in which condition it often happens, that one cross accident gives us more disquiet and discontent, than all our enjoyments can yield satisfaction. These are all overlooked for a time, and our thoughts wholly employed in ruminating on the other. On such occasions we indulge a foolish vexation, and are apt to think with Jonah, that we do well to be angry. But,

Secondly, Not real misfortunes only produce such effects; even imaginary ones are frequently sufficient for that purpose. Had Haman incurred some grievous disaster, some dire calamity; we should less have wondered, and more easily have accounted for the disturbance it gave him. But surely this was not his case. If his was really a misfortune, it was a misfortune of his own making. For what evil had befallen him, excepting the smart of his own folly? His mind was galled by a secret wish, which he knew not how to accomplish; and if he had, no good consequence of any kind was to be expected; but in all probability much damage and disadvantage. What he so earnestly and passionately wished, was only the gratification of a proud insolent humour: and yet, it seems, without this, he could neither enjoy himself, nor any thing that belonged to him. All his good fortune was vanished out of his sight, and wealth, honour, grandeur, availed him nothing.—Such a disposition, and such a conduct, however strange they may seem, are not uncommon among men. When we are in adversity, we are generally restless, impatient, full of anxieties and complaints; and when we rise above it, and our circumstances are improved, it is oftentimes done to very little purpose. Whatever our condition be, something or other is commonly wanting

to satisfy our minds, and set them at rest. When we are pressed with indigence and hardship, we are apt to think if we could but emerge, and once lift our heads above distress, we should not only be contented, but thankful. If Providence would be pleased to grant us what we call necessities, we should cheerfully sit down, and disquiet ourselves no further. Well; our point is gained, and more than gained; what follows? Does it produce the effect we proposed and promised? Is our contentment, gratitude, complacency, visible to all about us? Alas! this is seldom the case. As our conditions change, we change: when our old wishes and desires are answered, new ones start up; which discompose us full as much as the former, and engage us in the same toils and troublesome pursuits. Though the grievances we complained of are effectually removed, yet we soon make a shift to find out a fresh set. Either something remains which we earnestly covet, and know not how to obtain; or some petty misfortune happens which we cannot well bear: for a small matter will serve to disquiet us in the day of prosperity. Those lesser difficulties which appeared before scarce worthy of our notice, are now magnified into great hardships; and almost any thing affords a handle for complaint.—In short, as we contrive matters, there is often very little difference between prosperity and adversity. In adversity, we suffer those hardships which it pleases God's providence to lay upon us; and in prosperity we suffer those which we are pleased to lay upon ourselves: and as the latter are more numerous, so they are often more pungent than the former. And indeed those evils which are not real, but fantastical, seem to be invented by us on purpose to make ourselves more miserable than we need to be. We set our hearts on many things, and are passionately fond of them, though they gratify no one natural desire, but entirely owe their value to our imaginations: and the want of these is frequently our capital grievance; creating us more trouble, and torment, and vexation, than we ever endure from the most substantial calamities.—In a low state of life, our wants being natural, our wishes are commonly the same; and we have then neither leisure nor inclination to gratify our humours, and indulge our fancies. But

when our natural desires are once provided for, our minds generally take a new turn; looking out for other objects, and fresher entertainment. These we pursue with such eagerness and impatience, that the want of success becomes insupportable. Every disappointment gives great pain, and pierces to the quick. The many real blessings and solid advantages which we possess, are all disregarded. Our great concern is, that some particular humour remains ungratified: on which account we ridiculously give ourselves up to an unnatural grief, and refuse to be comforted.—Such reflections as these plainly offer themselves on a view of Haman's case, as represented by himself in the words of my text. Let us therefore go on to consider the impiety and folly of such a conduct.

First, The impiety of it; as it evidently implies great ingratitude towards God, and an impious opposition to his will. When God has been graciously pleased to fix a man in a fair and flourishing condition; to confer on him innumerable favours, and bless him almost to the height of his wishes; ought not such obligations to excite a strong sense of gratitude? Or if that be too much, ought they not at least to banish all discontent; and make him bear cheerfully those troubles and crosses which are incident to every state of human life? If a real misfortune befall him, is he not bound, doubly bound, to endure and submit? To repine at such a dispensation in his circumstances, and murmur in the midst of so many blessings, cannot but appear highly unreasonable and ungrateful. Perhaps God saw fit to *chasten him this once, that he might humble him, and prove him.* Perhaps such a chastisement was necessary; and though for the present *not joyous but grievous*, yet it might turn at length to a most desirable account, and deserve to be numbered among his chief blessings.—However, to set this consideration aside, and not to mention his sins and provocations, which give him at all times just cause to apprehend severer treatment, I would only ask, whether one single stroke of adversity be sufficient to cancel all his obligations, and blot out every mercy that he has received? In how unjust, how unequal, a balance, does that man weigh the dispensations of Heaven, who suffers one misfortune, or more than one, to

turn the scale against ten thousand blessings!

But to proceed: If it argue so much ingratitude in any man, to repine and struggle in a prosperous condition, when a real calamity befalls him; what shall we say or think of him, who sinks under an imaginary grievance, and provokes Heaven every hour with idle complaints, and groundless lamentations? For this indeed is the case before us, as I have already taken notice. And what can be said to excuse, or even extenuate, such extreme perverseness? Because some little event happens cross to our inclinations, is this enough to corrupt our enjoyments, and extinguish all sense of the divine bounty? Because we cannot have our wills and our humours in every thing, must we therefore, like froward children, take pet at God's providence, and grow sad and sullen we know not why? Instead of gladness, behold uneasiness! Instead of praises and acknowledgments, murmurs and complaints! Whence comes it to pass, that the great, the powerful Haman droops and languishes all on a sudden? What occasions his deep discontent, and makes him sit down in sorrow and sadness? Why, a certain Jew has affronted him, and he wants to be revenged; and if God will not give him an opportunity, he may revoke his gifts, and withdraw his blessings. And accordingly he did so: not only his riches and his honours, but his life too. The same ignominious instrument which he had contrived for the death of Mordecai, is appointed by Providence for his own; and his shame and punishment rendered as conspicuous as his former honour and prosperity. This may teach us, beyond any arguments, the iniquity and guilt of such a temper, and such a conduct. God is ever good and gracious to the children of men; ever ready to promote their welfare: but *he has no pleasure in fools*. He will not prosper ungrateful men against their wills; nor make those happy, who take great pains to make themselves miserable. *His spirit will not always strive* with our crooked humours, and capricious inclinations. If his gifts are lost upon us, and his favours turn to no account; what wonder if he resume them? Can we expect or imagine that he should gratify all our desires, whether reasonable or unreasonable, wise or foolish? Is it not a

great indignity to the divine Majesty, to suppose that he should concur in all our idle purposes and vain projects? Surely it is enough, if he grant us what is really fitting for us; if he give us a liberal share of his blessings, and thereby place happiness in our power, and within our reach. If this will not satisfy our minds, and make us easy, we are notoriously guilty of the most horrid ingratitude; and without question grievously offend God, who has been so bountiful to us in vain.

The second point to be considered is the folly of such a temper, and such a conduct. And here I might observe, that the very charge last mentioned includes this. That practice, by which we incur the indignation of Heaven, must be in the highest degree foolish, because fatal; as depriving us of the blessings we enjoy, and exposing us to severe judgments. But this is not all: for it makes men miserable, whether God execute vengeance or not; and indeed is itself a most grievous punishment. As it is a joyful and *pleasant thing to be thankful*; so to be unthankful and querulous, is vexation itself. Whatever state a man is in, common prudence obliges him to maintain, as well as he can, the tranquillity of his own mind. Impatience never does good. On the contrary, it doubles every misfortune, and turns even the gentlest griefs into adversity and wretchedness. On which account all wise men avoid it as much as possible in trouble and distress. And if they guard against it in distress, surely they can never give way to it in prosperity. Nevertheless, we find great numbers uneasy and unhappy in the most flourishing condition. Too many, to all appearance, seek out for causes and occasions of discontent. They seem, as it were, industrious in the pursuit of artificial griefs; and when they have reached them, are no longer able to enjoy themselves; but complain, in the very wantonness of lamentation, of their unfortunate state, and hard lot. Shall we call this folly, or something worse? How is it possible for rational creatures to behave in so very wild, so absurd a manner? When the comforts of life are put into our hands; shall we throw them away, and take up crosses instead of them? Can we find in our hearts, in spite of nature and common sense, to become

become volunteers in trouble and misery ! Most certainly it is not in our power to despise or undervalue happiness. Nay, we must unavoidably and necessarily desire it at all times. Yet we often seek it as if we did not desire it : that is, we frequently fail and fall short, when we might succeed if we pleased. Refusing to follow the order of nature, we would either be happy our own way, or not at all. Hence it is that we so eagerly follow our own inventions, and then are angry when they mislead us. Is it then for this only that the bustle of the world is carried on ? Do we build so many schemes of happiness, merely for the childish pleasure of pulling them down ? *What profit shall we thus have of all the labour that we take under the sun ?* In short, as the choice and pursuit of proper means to make ourselves happy, is true wisdom ; so the use of such means as plainly tend to make us miserable, is the very essence of folly.

From what has been said we may plainly perceive that no man's happiness depends chiefly on his outward condition. Let any man be surrounded with the advantages of life ; let him have health, wealth, and honour, to the extent of his wishes ; yet if his mind be out of order, he shall still be discontented, still miserable. If outward blessings could have procured happiness, surely Haman had never wanted it : for what worldly good did he not possess ; and that in great abundance ? But his mind was not answerable to the prosperity of his condition, and therefore *it availed him nothing*. The truth is, when a man's own heart pronounces a curse upon him, providence blesses him in vain. Many things without us may contribute to our well-being, if we will give them leave ; but they will not, they cannot make us happy against our wills. *Man's life consisteth not, as our Saviour informs us, in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*. That is, the true comfort and enjoyment of life is not principally owing to external goods ; and therefore must be sought for elsewhere.

It highly concerns us then to take great care of the frame and disposition of our minds ; for this is the true ground of happiness, and no other solid foundation any man lay. When we employ our hands in the provision of worldly goods, and at the same time neglect our hearts,

we take a certain method to lose our labour. However we may succeed as to the means, we shall surely be disappointed of our end. Should we prosper and flourish beyond all our hopes ; should we raise our condition as high as Haman's ; yet if we guide and govern as weakly as he did, there is just cause to fear we may perish as wretchedly. On the other hand, if our minds are rightly disposed, we are then proper objects of the divine bounty. The blessings which God sends will then be truly such, and we shall reap that satisfaction from them which he intends we should. If he pour into our hands abundance, it will not be lost on us ; and a much lesser portion will content us, and even make us happy. Whatever we possess we shall make the most of it, in the true sense of the word. The sweets of prosperity we shall then taste unmixed ; at least, we shall mingle no bitter ingredients ourselves. In short, a distempered mind, like a vitiated stomach, is apt to corrupt all it receives ; but wisdom and virtue give a just relish of God's gifts, and season every enjoyment. When it was offered to king Solomon's choice what blessing he would receive ; we find him rejecting all outward goods, and pitching on wisdom : a plain indication that he was no stranger to the gift before he asked it. For indeed a *wise and understanding heart* comprehends almost every thing. It directs a man to all that is truly good, and qualifies him to enjoy it to the best advantage. Without this, the most prosperous condition is uncomfortable ; and with it, even adversity tolerable. The wise man equally understands how to bear a low station, or become a high one : knows *how to want, and how to abound* ; and whatever state he is in, to promote God's glory, and his own true good.

Let us therefore labour for wisdom, which will guide our feet in every path of life ; which will support and direct us in all states, and every situation. And since, whenever we obtain it, it must come from above ; let us, in imitation of the royal pattern before-mentioned, ask it of God ; *who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not* : humbly beseeching him, that, amidst his manifold gifts, he will not leave us destitute of his grace, to use them always to his honour and glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON IV.

The Wisdom of regarding Counsel,
and the Folly of rejecting it.

PROV. xii. 15.

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes; but
he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.

HOWEVER such a concession may expose us to the severe imputation in my text, it must be owned, for it cannot be disowned, that the generality of mankind are very partial to their own schemes, and immoderately addicted to their own ways of thinking and acting. However their judgments be formed, whether deliberately, or rashly; however their measures be concerted, whether wisely or weakly; they resolutely adhere to them, and persist in them at all adventures. Every man's way is, and must be, in some degree, acceptable to himself; otherwise he would never have chosen it. But, nevertheless, whoever is wise, will be apt to suspect and be diffident of himself; and upon that account be willing to *hearken unto counsel*: whereas the foolish man being, in proportion to his folly, full of himself, and swallowed up in conceit, will seldom take any counsel but his own; and for that very reason, because it is his own. Hence it often happens, that in opposition to all the reasons and remonstrances that can be offered him, he continues immovable in his choice, and thereby exposes himself to many inconveniences that might easily have been avoided. Thus his interest falls a sacrifice to his vanity, and he never gains wisdom till he has dearly paid for it. Nothing will convince him that he needs other men's counsel, till he finds himself bewildered in his own devices.

In treating of this subject, I shall first consider it in general; and, secondly, with a particular regard to our main concern. Considering it in general, the folly of rejecting counsel, and the wisdom of hearkening to it, may evidently be made appear on the following grounds:

First, The mind of man is not only finite, and limited, but of a short extent, and a narrow comprehension. When he has improved it as much as he can,

which is seldom the case, still his views will be very imperfect, and his knowledge inconsiderable. When he has sought and searched as far as he is able, innumerable things will escape him; and he is sure to find himself frequently at a loss. Should we suppose all human knowledge put together; comparatively speaking, it would amount to very little. Like a great number of rivulets united in one stream, it would bear no proportion to the vast and boundless ocean of truth. How small a pittance then must that be, which falls, or can fall, to any particular person's share? Whatever pains he has taken, whatever inquiries he has made, in numberless cases and respects he finds himself in the dark; very often puzzled and perplexed, and wanting help on almost every occasion. Like a traveller in a strange road, he must either take directions, or frequently lose his way, and wander he knows not whither.—Nothing is more absurd than to imagine that any man can be too wise to learn, or too knowing to need instruction. Nay, whoever entertains such a thought in respect of himself, does thereby demonstrate his own folly, and prove himself egregiously ignorant. And this holds equally true in points of speculation, and matters of practice. As every man wants a communication of light for the improvement of his conceptions, so he no less needs counsel for the direction of his actions. Various cases are continually occurring, many exigencies must he meet with in life, wherein he must either take advice, or be a great sufferer. Nor is it any objection against the wisdom of Providence, that men are not always able to direct themselves in the execution of those affairs, and the discharge of those duties which are incumbent on them. On the contrary, it was most wisely ordained, that in this, and many other instances, they should mutually depend on each other's assistance. As they were intended for society, such a dependence was requisite to bind and cement it; to join their heads and hearts, and enable them more successfully to promote the great ends of life. But, to return: Since all men's minds are thus defective, and their knowledge short and scanty; since, on many occasions, they are unable to direct themselves, or remove those difficulties in which they are often engaged;

engaged; it is manifestly great folly to put entire confidence in their own judgments, and lean solely on *their own understandings*. On the other hand, to *hearken unto counsel*, is a disparagement to no man; so far from it, that it is an indication to wisdom, and the likeliest way to increase it. It is a natural remedy, and a proper supply, for human imperfection; a safe and profitable expedient; and the wisest men are ever most willing to make use of it. But,

Secondly, The reasonableness of regarding counsel, and the folly of despising it, will more evidently appear, if we consider the diversity of men's talents and opportunities. Let us suppose a man so far indulging his vanity, as to conclude himself possessed of as much knowledge, and as large abilities, as any person whatever; and, to shorten the dispute, let this vain conclusion, this high demand, be granted him: still it will be nothing to the purpose; nor will it justify that self-confidence, and neglect of counsel, which are condemned in my text. In some points, some parts of knowledge, he would nevertheless be excelled; admitting, in the main, that equality of understanding which he pretends to. For whatever men's capacities may be, most certain it is, that there is great difference and variety among them; I mean not in degree, but in kind. Their talents, even when equally valuable and good, yet point different ways, and are suited to different objects and employments. One man's natural genius lies one way, and another's another. And supposing them followed and cultivated alike, the consequence must be, that each of them must excel and be superior to the other in that branch of skill for which nature has fitted him. What we read of supernatural gifts, the same holds true of natural powers; that *they are divided to every man severally* as the donor pleases: and that purposely, without question, to answer better the various uses and occasions of life. Supposing then any man's capacity as good, in its kind, as he imagines it; yet surely he must allow that other men may have equal talents and abilities of other kinds. From whence it follows, that if not in all, yet in many cases, they must be able to judge better, and give better directions, than he can pretend to. No man had ever such an

universal genius as to excel every thing. And if any one can arrive at such an extravagant degree of vanity, as to fancy such a thing of himself, all that can be concluded from it is, that, however he may flatter himself, he wants counsel more than any man living. But, further, as men's talents are various, so their opportunities of improvement and experience are very different: not only such opportunities as arise from men's respective professions, wherein they are doubtless most capable of judging, and most fit to be consulted; but such as they accidentally meet with in the several paths and pursuits of life. Every man of thought and application must gain experience in those matters wherein he has been conversant; and the more experience he has, the fitter he must ordinarily be to direct those that want it:—and want it every man must in many things. As no man has an universal understanding, so no man has, or can have, universal experience. Both the one and the other are unavoidably limited to a few particulars. The narrowness of our minds, and the shortness of our lives, will seldom admit of any thing further. As then almost every man may be capable of giving advice in some points or other; so there is no man who is not often obliged to receive it, or to suffer through the want of it. Hence it comes to pass, that the lowest part of mankind have been sometimes qualified to inform the highest; that in some cases philosophers have been instructed by illiterate rustics, and even princes by peasants. Nor have the greatest men, on proper occasions, declined to hear and follow the advice of the least. And indeed it is an argument of true greatness of mind, as well as good sense and judgment, so to do. For most certain it is, that the knowledge of the wisest men may be and is often indebted to the experience of those who know the least. And if any man is so vain and so weak as to slight the judgment, and contemn the counsel of other men; if no way is right in his eyes but *his own*; he may enjoy his own esteem and good opinion as he can; but the other part of mankind will not fail to brand him as Solomon does in my text. Again,

Thirdly, The wisdom of hearkening unto counsel, and the folly of despising it, are further manifest from the following

consideration: Let men's abilities be never so great, and their knowledge never so extensive, still they ought not, and without great danger and inconvenience cannot trust wholly and entirely to themselves. For those abilities and that knowledge easily may be, and often are, rendered useless by the prejudices and prepossessions of men's own minds. The best understandings are frequently biassed, not to say blinded, by favourite opinions and darling inclinations. Nothing is more common than for men's appetites and affections to bribe their judgments, and seduce them into erroneous and absurd ways of thinking and acting. They are often entangled and set fast, not through the want of light and knowledge, not through any defect of their heads, but through the deceitfulness of their hearts. In many cases where they could easily direct other men, they suffer themselves to be caught; and are driven into the snare by strength of inclination, or the force of habit. The plainest points are often blundered in the decision; the weakest designs undertaken, and the silliest actions done, by men of superior understanding and distinguished capacity. If it be inquired how this comes to pass, the answer is, that their judgments are clouded by some strong prejudice, or corrupted by some powerful affection; insomuch that they can neither hear nor see any thing but what makes for one side of the question. And though the evidence on the other side be much stronger, and would appear so to them if they would let it; yet some way or other it is effectually stifled, and stands for nothing. In such a case as this what avail any man's abilities? What signifies his capacity, while he thus plays tricks with his faculties, and will not use them fairly and honestly? Is it not plain that he wants counsel and admonition as much as if he were never so ignorant? And indeed he really is, on such occasions, as ignorant as a man can be; only with this difference, that his ignorance is not involuntary, but in a great measure wilful; not his misfortune, but his crime. Let men's eyes or understandings be ever so good, it is at any time in their power to make both useless by shutting them up against the light. While a man is resolved to wink, he must and will be as much in the dark as those that want sight. But this acquired dark-

ness, this voluntary incapacity, as well as the want of counsel thereby occasioned, no where appear more frequently, or more remarkably, than in the transaction of our spiritual concerns, and what relates to the discharge of our duty: which is the

Second point that I proposed to consider. Here, then, the power of prejudice, and the bias of inclination, shew themselves in the highest degree. Though we want no knowledge, though our understandings be never so well informed, we can find ways and means to render it ineffectual. We can, and too often do, withstand the clearest evidence, and shut our eyes against the plainest reasons in the world. And if our ears be shut too; if we will not hearken to counsel, nor suffer ourselves to be advised; it is easy to see what is like to be the consequence.—Whenever we seriously reflect on it, we cannot but be astonished to think what pains men take, and what arts they use, to delude themselves and impose upon their own judgments; and that in affairs of the utmost consequence. *The way of a man*, says our royal Author, *is right in his own eyes, though the end thereof be the ways of death*. When we have wandered out of the road, and almost lost ourselves among pits and precipices, we can make ourselves believe that we have continued all the while in the highway to truth and happiness. So strong is this self-delusion, that it hides from us whatever we have no mind to see; and, in the midst of guilt and danger, soothes us into an opinion of innocence and security.—Very often we lay aside all thoughts of our duty, and keep it quite out of our minds: and when we do think of it, we make a shift to think just what we have a mind. In respect of what is past, we place our conduct in the best light, and represent our actions in the fairest colours. Our judgments are always favourable, and sometimes directly false; and as much as possible we teach our very consciences to flatter. We speak peace to ourselves, when there is no peace; and conclude ourselves in safety, when we are on the very brink of ruin. In respect of futurity, whatever may be dreadful or disagreeable, is carefully covered, and kept out of sight. On the contrary, we build fair hopes, and cut out fine prospects, in our own imaginations; and what is wanting in truth and probability,

is made up with fallacy and fiction. In short, such is the deceitfulness of sin, and so weakly are we guarded against its frauds, that nothing can be more foolish, nothing more fatal, than trusting wholly to ourselves, and rejecting the benefit of wise counsel and faithful admonition. If we refused other men's advice merely in order to follow the dictates of our reason; though this in many cases would still be folly, yet it would be moderate folly in comparison of what we are often guilty of. We not only neglect other men's understandings, but frequently our own. Instead of listening to our reason, as we pretend, we are many times only consulting our inclinations, and taking counsel of our lusts and appetites. And, without doubt, miserable counsellors they are. What should we think of that man, who, renouncing the protection of law and government, should commit himself to the custody of wild creatures, and beasts of prey? Such, and more foolish, is his conduct, who, abandoning his reason, gives himself up to the guidance of his lusts and passions. For in truth the passions of men, when they have once broken loose from the restraints of reason and religion, and have gotten their full liberty, are more unruly and more mischievous than any brutal instincts whatever: so great need have we of the direction of our reason and understanding; and indeed of all the reason that we can meet with either at home or abroad. We should carefully *incline our ear unto Wisdom*, wherever it is to be found. We should *seek her as silver*, according to our wise Author's advice, *and search for her, as for hid treasures. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her; and happy is every one that retaineth her. Then shall he walk in his way safely, and his foot shall not stumble.*

But it is further to be observed, that as men's attachment to their own ways, and their aversion to counsel, are frequently owing to the prejudices and partialities of self-love, or the delusions of sinful lusts; so they are often occasioned by thoughtlessness, negligence, and inconsideration. However apt they may be to mistake or misrepresent their duty, most certain it is that they are still more prone to forget it, as well as those important truths that are connected with it. Though they very well know what obliga-

tions they are under, and sufficiently understand where their true interest lies; yet while these things are unconsidered and unthought of, it is much the same as if they were unknown. If men will not take care to keep them in mind, but rather endeavour to keep them out, how can it be expected that they should have any influence, or take any effect? Supposing, therefore, that they did not want instruction and counsel, yet certainly they stand in great need of faithful monitors, to bring these neglected truths to their remembrance; to open their eyes, and recall their thoughts; and, if possible, to fix them on those weighty concerns which they are so apt and so inclinable to forget: to admonish and exhort them daily, lest they be hardened, or stupified, through the deceitfulness of sin. Such help as this is universally wanted; nor can it without extreme folly and desperate obstinacy be rejected.

Especially if it be considered, how much depends on the care we take of our conduct, and the discharge of duty. This is matter not only of a great moment, but really of infinite consequence. When we fail of success in our temporal affairs, at most we can only sustain a temporal damage, which perhaps may be repaired; and if it cannot, yet it may be born with patience, and even contentment. For most of the things of this world are of such a nature, that we may either do with them, or without them. And, moreover, this life itself is but a span, and will soon be ended. But if we finally miscarry in our spiritual concerns, the loss is irreparable, unspeakable, and eternal. If we forfeit the favour of God, and that great and endless happiness which belongs to it; what can there be left to relieve or comfort us? If we lose that mighty good, that inestimable blessing; all our hopes are struck dead at once, and our expectations cut off for ever; we are utterly ruined beyond the reach of remedy; beyond the help of time, and all the powers of patience. Can we then be too careful, too solicitous, about this important affair, this everlasting concern? Can we reject any means, or neglect any opportunities of securing it? Ought we not rather to accept willingly, and even seek diligently, whatever may assist us therein,

therein, or contribute to our success? Does not that counsel deserve to be hearkened to, which warns us to *flee from the wrath to come*, and not to neglect so great, so eternal, a *salvation*? which is meant to withdraw our affections from this vain transitory world, and fix them on the joys and glories of a blessed immortality? In short, if there be any wisdom in refusing and despising admonitions of this nature, it will be impossible to prove that there is any such thing as folly, or even to understand what it means.

But, after all, however lightly we may esteem the helps and directions of human wisdom, yet surely the highest regard and reverence are due to divine. Whatever we may think of the advices of mere men, yet this can be no reason for neglecting those that are inspired? If we will not mind fallible counsellors, yet shall we give no heed to prophets and apostles? Shall we not hearken to the Son of God, the Saviour of the world; who came into it on purpose to instruct and direct us, and guide us in the way to everlasting salvation? Lastly, shall we not attend, devoutly and diligently attend, to the counsels of our Heavenly Father, and the admonitions of the Most High? Can we have more regard to what is *right in our own eyes*, than to what is right in his? Dare we not trust Omniscience? Is it possible for us to imagine that Infinite Wisdom cannot direct us better than we can do ourselves? But I shall not expostulate any further. The thing itself speaks so plain, that nothing can make it plainer. I shall therefore conclude with the words of wisdom, or rather the God of wisdom, delivered to us by our royal Author: *Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught my counsel, and despised all my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction as a whirlwind: when distress and anguish cometh upon you, then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me. For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord; therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. But who so hearkeneth*

unto me, shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.

S E R M O N V.

God's Government of the World a
sure and most joyful Truth.

PSALM xcvi. 1.

The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice.—Or,
according to the other translation,

The Lord is king, the earth may be glad thereof.

TO acknowledge a Deity, and yet suppose, as some of the heathen philosophers pretended to do, that he is altogether unconcerned either in the creation or government of the world, is owning him in words, and disowning him in reality. In like manner, to confess that God made the world, and all things therein, and at the same time deny his care and providence over it, is, in effect, maintaining a God without divine attributes. It is maintaining inconsistent opinions, and separating things essentially united. As sure as there is a God, so sure it is that he must be supremely wise, and infinitely good. But to create the world, and then leave it to itself, and all the confusion consequent thereupon, is a conduct impossible to be reconciled with either of those perfections. If our clearest ideas are to be trusted, there would be no wisdom, no goodness at all in such a procedure. For whatever ends might be proposed in the production of such a forlorn world, they could not possibly be answered. Neither the Creator's glory, nor his creatures happiness, could be in any measure accomplished without a providence. And as to any other intentions, we are not able to frame any conception of them. However, they must needs likewise be ineffectual, and frustrate on the same supposition.

But let us examine the grounds of this important doctrine somewhat more particularly and distinctly. Strictly speaking, the creation necessarily requires the continued influence and perpetual support of its Creator. The natural world could not subsist a moment without the Almighty hand which first formed it. Should God be pleased at any time to withdraw his power and protection, all nature must sink in an instant. Most
certainly

certainly every thing would immediately run to ruin, and probably fall to nothing. Both reason and revelation assure us, that *by him all things consist. That he preserveth and upholdeth all things by the word of his power. That in his hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind: and that in him we live, move, and have our being.* In this respect, therefore, God's providence not only stands on firm foundations, and sure evidence, but appears absolutely necessary; since the world could no more continue without his aid, than it could exist without it at first. The great machine of the universe, so wonderfully framed and fitted as it is, yet cannot go of itself; as unavoidably depending on its Almighty Author, and naturally requiring his concurrence, to keep it not only in order, but in being. Nor does this argue any defect in his workmanship; because an independent system of creatures is not only absurd, but utterly impossible.

Nevertheless, it is not so much this, as another branch of Divine Providence, that we are chiefly to understand by the declaration in my text. God superintends indeed the whole; and governs the natural, as well as the moral, world. All creatures are subject to his power and rule, whether they be animate or inanimate; but when his reign, his dominion, his kingdom, are spoken of, we are primarily, if not peculiarly, to understand his government of moral agents, and rational subjects. As these are his noblest productions, and stand at the top of the creation, they must needs be the principal objects of his care and providence. To direct mere matter, and produce out of it so much order and convenience, so much beauty and variety, so much symmetry and proportion, requires doubtless great power and wisdom; but to preside over the intellectual system, to rule not only the *children of men, and the kingdoms of the earth*, but all *angels and authorities, and heavenly powers*; such an administration as this is divine in the highest sense; and such a kingdom most worthy of him, whose power is boundless and his understanding infinite: and who upon that account is *the only Potentate, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.*

But to proceed: This kingdom of God, this government of the moral world, being in a more especial manner the doc-

trine of my text, and indeed most expressly taught throughout the whole Scriptures, need not be more particularly proved from thence. Let us therefore briefly and impartially inquire how it appears to the reason of our own minds. The question then is, if it can be called so, Whether God's creatures, his intelligent creatures, be under his care, protection, and government; or whether they are wholly abandoned to their own management, and given up to their own guidance? If they be left to themselves, and the government of the world is refused by the maker of it, no other account can possibly be given of the thing, but that he either wanted power or inclination; either was not able to execute this great charge, or not willing. And if both these suppositions are evidently false and groundless, the consequence must be the truth of the proposition set forth in my text. That God neither did, nor could, want power to govern the world, is manifest even to demonstration. For not to mention that omnipotence is an essential attribute of the Divine Nature, most certain it is, that he who was able to create the world, must much more be able to direct and govern it; creation implying and requiring the highest of all power. He who could raise the universe from nothing, and fix it originally in the most exact order, cannot possibly fail of full power to preserve and regulate it. *He who planted the ear, as the Psalmist observes, shall he not hear; he who formed the eye, shall he not see?* Can any thing escape his perception who inhabits eternity and infinity? who vitally exists every where, and can be absent no where? and as nothing is unknown to him, so nothing is *impossible with him.* Nothing can *resist his will*, or make the least opposition to his decrees. Omnipotence knows no difficulties; but, with the greatest ease, accomplishes whatever it pleases, and *subdueth all things to itself.* The whole creation is full of this truth; and every object we meet with, proclaims the incomprehensible power and majesty of him that made it.

Since then it cannot be supposed, without the greatest contradiction to his nature, that God should be unable to govern the world; we are next to consider, whether he could be supposed unwilling. And the resolution of this point will readily

readily be found. For whatever is most agreeable to perfect wisdom and goodness, must in this case be fact. Most infallibly God is ever willing to determine, and do, what is wisest and best. Can then any man think it agreeable to perfect wisdom, that God should be so regardless of the works of his hands, as immediately to lay aside all care and concern about them? that he should make the world, and then forsake it as soon as he had made it? that he should furnish and fit it up in the noblest manner, and replenish it with an endless variety of inhabitants? that he should produce innumerable orders of beings, and ranks of creatures, many of them formed after his own divine image, and qualified for the knowledge and imitation of himself, and when he had so done, relinquish the whole, and give every thing up to chance and confusion? How can such a conduct as this be ascribed to any wise agent? and much less to Infinite Wisdom. For as we before observed, whatever ends or intentions the Creator proposed, they could never be accomplished without his direction and concurrence. But perhaps it may be urged, that the world was framed in such wonderful order and perfection, as to stand in no further need of the Creator's superintendence; and that his rational creatures were made capable of guiding themselves, and governing those beneath them; and that thereby the order of the world might be maintained without the Divine interposition:—the answer to which is, that every part of this pretence is groundless. It is demonstrable, that the very material world cannot be kept in order by second causes, but continually stands in need of the Creator's influence, as might be shewn at large. And much less could the order and harmony of the intellectual world be maintained without the Divine Administration. It is true, men are endued with reason, and angels with more; but yet both men and angels being endued also with liberty, and imperfect, might act against the light of their own minds, and fall into disorder; and accordingly both have actually done so. On which account, were it not for God's providence and government, it is evident that the moral world, as well as the natural, would become a mere chaos, and fall into inextricable confusion. Is it not

necessary for the public security, that evil men and evil angels be curbed and restrained? Is it not necessary, that innocence be protected, and virtue encouraged? that guilt be exposed and prosecuted, and vice and villany checked and punished? And how should any thing of this kind be effectually done, if God did not sit at the helm, direct all affairs, and dispose of all events, according to the rules of righteousness and truth. But in order to discover the weakness of this plea, we need only take notice how it would hold in any human establishments. Is any thing to be done without rulers and governors? and supposing a set of laws, of the best laws, already made, will they execute themselves? It is very true that men have reason to direct them, and laws of various kinds; but it is likewise as true, that many men have wild humours, fierce desires, and furious passions, which frequently prompt them to act in defiance both of law and reason. On which account, and for the enforcement and support of both, an executive power is, and ever will be, absolutely necessary in all states and communities. And must not this observation hold much stronger in respect of the whole creation? If the several societies among men require rulers and governors, and cannot subsist without them; what can we think of the universe itself? Must not the whole stand in greater need of government, than any part? Most certain therefore it is, that the all-wise Creator would never produce such a great and glorious system, and then leave it in a state of anarchy; this being utterly inconsistent with all the rules of wisdom that we are capable of discovering.

Nor is it less repugnant to his righteousness and goodness. As perfectly good, he must propose the welfare of his creatures; and, in order thereto, he would not fail to direct and govern them. For, as we have already seen, if he had left them to themselves, they could neither expect happiness, security, nor quiet. Again, his guidance and government of the world clearly follows from the rectitude of his nature. It is impossible that he should be ignorant of the behaviour of his creatures. He must see at all times whether they do well or ill, whether they act virtuously or wickedly; and, as a righteous Being, cannot fail to judge them

them accordingly. If God did not govern the world, no sufficient distinction could be maintained between virtue and vice; nay, in many cases it would happen, the latter prospered more than the former. Vice would often succeed and flourish, and virtue fall into extreme distresses. Now this, I say, is what a righteous God cannot possibly suffer; not finally I mean. He may suffer it for a season, and in fact we find that he actually does so; inasmuch that his government of the world has been sometimes called in question on this very account. But certainly without just grounds. The irregular distribution of good and evil in this life is indeed a clear proof of a future state, wherein every thing will be punctually adjusted and set to rights; but it proves nothing at all against the doctrine we are considering. As sure as God is righteous and holy, vice will suffer, and virtue will prevail and prosper in due time. But no reason can be shewn why the present time must needs be the proper time: so far from it, that good reasons may be given for the contrary. However, since it must be done sooner or later, either in this life or the next; since it necessarily follows from the perfections of the Divine Nature, that the righteous will be protected and encouraged, and the wicked punished; and since, moreover, this can only be done by the great Searcher of hearts; the consequence must be, that the world is governed by him.

Should we go on to inquire how he governs it, and presume to search into the methods and measures of Divine Providence, we may easily bewilder ourselves in a speculation vastly too high for us. We have all the reason in the world to assure ourselves, that God's government is most perfect, in all respects; but to account for the direction and disposal of particular events, and to discover how far they come under, and coincide with, general laws, seem undertakings far above our present faculties. We do not so much as know, with any certainty, whether there be any just ground for distinguishing, as we ordinarily do, between a general and a particular Providence. All particular events, for ought we know, may be superintended and disposed by general laws. I might explain and confirm this observation by various instances and suppositions; but I shall

only mention at present that which follows; a supposition not only very ancient, but very natural, and therefore more easy to be conceived, and more apt to be entertained. What I mean is, that the particularities of human life may be specially provided for by a delegation of power and authority to subordinate agents; by whose invisible intervention events may be directed agreeably to the will and wisdom of the Supreme Governor: and that perhaps in perfect consistence with the stated laws of the natural world. What absurdity, what impropriety, in supposing such a provision as this for the tuition and government of mankind? Can we think it any derogation from the honour and majesty of the Supreme Ruler, to invest certain beings of exalted powers and perfections with the administration of his providential decrees; they presiding over the several parts of the universe, while he himself, who alone is capable of it, informs and directs the whole? This seems perfectly conformable to that subordination and scale of beings, which prevail throughout all nature, as far as our faculties are able to search. Could we see further, we might probably find every system, every habitable globe, under the government of vicegerents; and perhaps the various districts and provinces of each divided amongst the host of heaven, and respectively administered according to the appointments of unerring wisdom. If this be agreeable to nature and reason, as must, I think, be allowed; I may safely add, that it is by no means disagreeable to revelation: so far from it, that we find in Scripture frequent intimations of this amazing scheme of Providence. I see not therefore why it may not be supposed a general law of God's moral government; and that such a one, as no way interferes, but perfectly consists with his laws of nature. But I return to what is more directly the doctrine of my text.

Thus then it appears from the plain principles of reason, that *the Lord is King*, as we read in my text: and the next thing to be considered is the inference which there follows, *the earth may be glad thereof*. And, in truth, it is one of the justest and most natural inferences in the world. For what is there in all the compass of nature, or even within the reach of human imagination, that can administer

administer to the minds of men so much true comfort, contentment, and complacency, as this single fact is capable of doing? The most desirable, and most joyful truth, that can either be uttered, or conceived, is, that *the Lord is King*, and that *his dominion endureth throughout all ages*. If we have any thought, any reflection, must we not needs be glad to find ourselves in the hands, and under the protection of that Governor, whose great and constant aim is the safety and felicity of all his subjects? Who enjoins us no other law than those of truth and righteousness; which at the same time are the rule, the inviolable rule, of his own actions. A Governor, who never wants power to do whatever he pleases, and who never pleases to do any thing but what is just and fit. Who is gracious, merciful, and long-suffering; full of gentleness, goodness, and loving-kindness; and whose *tender mercies are over all his works*. In short, a Governor, who is so far from dealing with his creatures by any capricious rules, or arbitrary measures; that his will is the very *law of kindness*; all his precepts are favours and blessings, and his very judgments benefactions.

If we reflect on our condition and circumstances in this present world, we cannot but find cause to rejoice, on all accounts, that we are under the tuition and administration of the Supreme Being. Considering our wants and infirmities, our frailties and follies, and how unable we are to help ourselves; our whole life ought to be looked upon as a state of minority: even in our best and wisest period, to lose the guardianship of Heaven would be certain ruin. This is our grand support and security; and, comparatively speaking, the sole foundation of our hope and trust. We are beset on all sides, and threatened from all quarters; are compassed about with a great variety of dangers and distresses. Many difficulties we meet with that we cannot conquer; many obstacles that we cannot surmount. Numberless evils hang over our heads, ready to fall upon us, and crush us, every instant. When misfortunes are at a distance, very often we cannot foresee them; and when we do foresee them, we often know not how to prevent them. And when they arrive, and are actually upon us, we frequently are at a loss how to redress them, or

where to find a remedy. We are liable to so many disasters without, and so many disorders within; are so much exposed to the fury of the elements, and the greater fury of lawless and violent men; find so many snares and temptations planted in our way; have so many hazards and hardships to encounter; such a number of infirmities, corruptions, and evil habits to subdue in ourselves; and such force, fraud, and falsehood to withstand in others; that were we deprived of the protection of Divine Providence, we should be left utterly desolate, and sink down into the depths of sin and sorrow, and misery, as naturally as *the sparks fly upwards*. But, on the other hand, if we consider ourselves as the objects of God's care and concern; that he is our ruler, our defender, our guide, and *we his people, and the sheep of his pasture*; the scene changes, our condition brightens, and every thing appears with a new face. If we take care not to forfeit his favour, nothing need to dismay us; for nothing can greatly hurt us. *Though we walked through the valley of the shadow of death; though the earth were removed, and the mountains carried into the midst of the sea; yet should we need to fear no evil; for God is our refuge and strength, a present help, and a sure support, in every trouble*. Are we ignorant? God is omniscient. Are we impotent? He is almighty. Are we apt to err, and prone to sin and folly? He is unerring wisdom, and spotless perfection. If he be on our side, who can be against us? If he protect us, what can touch us? Are we surrounded with dangers and calamities, troubles and trials; inasmuch that our case appears desperate? He can extricate us with the greatest ease, and deliver us in a moment. For all nature is in his hand, and the whole creation at his beck. So far then we have just cause to rejoice, and be glad, that *the Lord is King*.

But further: As there are many and great evils to be avoided, so there is a great variety of good to be sought after. Many wants and wishes we unavoidably have; many natural desires that require to be gratified; many craving appetites, and clamorous affections, that will be provided for, or continually torment us. Though we may subsist, yet we cannot be said to prosper, in a temporal sense, without a competent share of the comforts
and

and conveniencies of life. And had we nothing to depend on but our own endeavours, how little should we be able to make of them? We are apt to ascribe our successes to ourselves, and our own conduct; but, doubtless, in a great measure, very unjustly. They are chiefly owing to Divine Providence, and the succours of Heaven; which conduct us, though unseen, and carry us on to prosperous events. Without these invisible aids, we should fail, and fall short, in almost every undertaking. No art, no skill, no diligence, would avail us, if Providence forlook us. It would only be *lost labour, that we hasted to rise early, and eat the bread of carefulness*, if we had nothing to trust to but our own endeavours. Nor could any of our fellow-creatures ensure our success. For, comparatively speaking, *vain is the help of man*, and precarious are all his purposes. But though human means be insufficient for the accomplishing of our ends, and the satisfying of our desires; yet what may we not expect from the interposition of Heaven, and the wisdom and bounty of God's providence? What good may we not hope for, if we be not wanting to ourselves? Whatever objects we set our hearts upon; whatever blessings we have in view; if they be fit for us, and we for them, we shall, in due time, assuredly obtain them. And is not this consideration abundantly sufficient to satisfy any reasonable mind? If any enjoyment be, in its consequences, mischievous to ourselves, we are false to our own interest if we desire it: and if it be detrimental to the public, we cannot innocently pretend to it. But under these limitations, our pursuits will not fail to be crowned with success. And what a happiness, what an honour, is it to the children of men, to have, I will not say such a governor, but such a patron, such a benefactor, such a friend? A friend whose power is commensurate to his wisdom, and his goodness to both. A friend, so kind and constant, as never to desert those who do not desert him. Whose favours are inestimable, and his bounty inexhaustible. In a word, on whom we entirely depend for all the blessings of this life, and all our hopes in the next. Upon the whole, to be under the divine rule and government, is the most desirable circumstance in the world. To be directed by infinite wis-

dom, protected by infinite power, and befriended by infinite goodness, is the happiest situation, and the most glorious privilege, that could belong either to men or angels.

What remains then, but that we cheerfully and thankfully submit to the authority of our heavenly Ruler? That we pay a constant regard, and a willing obedience, to his sacred laws; the violation of which is not only rebellion against God, but enmity against ourselves. By disobedience, and impenitence, we may turn the *joy and gladness*, spoken of in my text, into grief and terror. For most undoubtedly the *Judge of all the earth will do what is right*. He will not fail to execute judgment on obstinate and incorrigible offenders. But if we obey his laws, and keep his commandments; if we sincerely endeavour to fulfil his will, and discharge our duty; we are sure of his acceptance, encouragement, and favour. Most gently shall we be treated, most graciously indulged, and most abundantly rewarded. *No good thing will he withhold from his faithful subjects and servants*. Happy then are all they *who are in such a case; yea, blessed are the people who have the Lord for their God*.

S E R M O N VI.

The Conduct of the Bereans considered, and recommended to Imitation.

ACTS, xvii. 11.

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind; and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

THE persons of whom my text makes this honourable mention, were the Jews of Berea, a city in Macedonia. Hither Paul and Silas, as we find in the foregoing verse, were sent by the brethren, to preach the word of God, and propagate the gospel; the great design which the Apostles every where pursued in so unwearied a manner. In the beginning of this chapter, we read they came to Thessalonica; where, *in a synagogue of the Jews, Paul reasoned with them out of the Scriptures; opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered; and risen again from the dead; and that*

administer to the minds of men so much true comfort, contentment, and complacency, as this single fact is capable of doing? The most desirable, and most joyful truth, that can either be uttered, or conceived, is, that *the Lord is King*, and that *his dominion endureth throughout all ages*. If we have any thought, any reflection, must we not needs be glad to find ourselves in the hands, and under the protection of that Governor, whose great and constant aim is the safety and felicity of all his subjects? Who enjoins us no other law than those of truth and righteousness; which at the same time are the rule, the inviolable rule, of his own actions. A Governor, who never wants power to do whatever he pleases, and who never pleases to do any thing but what is just and fit. Who is gracious, merciful, and long-suffering; full of gentleness, goodness, and loving-kindness; and whose *tender mercies are over all his works*. In short, a Governor, who is so far from dealing with his creatures by any capricious rules, or arbitrary measures; that his will is the very *law of kindness*; all his precepts are favours and blessings, and his very judgments benefactions.

If we reflect on our condition and circumstances in this present world, we cannot but find cause to rejoice, on all accounts, that we are under the tuition and administration of the Supreme Being. Considering our wants and infirmities, our frailties and follies, and how unable we are to help ourselves; our whole life ought to be looked upon as a state of minority: even in our best and wisest period, to lose the guardianship of Heaven would be certain ruin. This is our grand support and security; and, comparatively speaking, the sole foundation of our hope and trust. We are beset on all sides, and threatened from all quarters; are compassed about with a great variety of dangers and distresses. Many difficulties we meet with that we cannot conquer; many obstacles that we cannot surmount. Numberless evils hang over our heads, ready to fall upon us, and crush us, every instant. When misfortunes are at a distance, very often we cannot foresee them; and when we do foresee them, we often know not how to prevent them. And when they arrive, and are actually upon us, we frequently are at a loss how to redress them, or

where to find a remedy. We are liable to so many disasters without, and so many disorders within; are so much exposed to the fury of the elements, and the greater fury of lawless and violent men; find so many snares and temptations planted in our way; have so many hazards and hardships to encounter; such a number of infirmities, corruptions, and evil habits to subdue in ourselves; and such force, fraud, and falsehood to withstand in others; that were we deprived of the protection of Divine Providence, we should be left utterly desolate, and sink down into the depths of sin and sorrow, and misery, as naturally as *the sparks fly upwards*. But, on the other hand, if we consider ourselves as the objects of God's care and concern; that he is our ruler, our defender, our guide, and *we his people, and the sheep of his pasture*; the scene changes, our condition brightens, and every thing appears with a new face. If we take care not to forfeit his favour, nothing need to dismay us; for nothing can greatly hurt us. *Though we walked through the valley of the shadow of death; though the earth were removed, and the mountains carried into the midst of the sea; yet should we need to fear no evil; for God is our refuge and strength, a present help, and a sure support, in every trouble*. Are we ignorant? God is omniscient. Are we impotent? He is almighty. Are we apt to err, and prone to sin and folly? He is unerring wisdom, and spotless perfection. If he be on our side, who can be against us? If he protect us, what can touch us? Are we surrounded with dangers and calamities, troubles and trials; insomuch that our case appears desperate? He can extricate us with the greatest ease, and deliver us in a moment. For all nature is in his hand, and the whole creation at his beck. So far then we have just cause to rejoice, and be glad, that *the Lord is King*.

But further: As there are many and great evils to be avoided, so there is a great variety of good to be sought after. Many wants and wishes we unavoidably have; many natural desires that require to be gratified; many craving appetites, and clamorous affections, that will be provided for, or continually torment us. Though we may subsist, yet we cannot be said to prosper, in a temporal sense, without a competent share of the comforts
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and conveniencies of life. And had we nothing to depend on but our own endeavours, how little should we be able to make of them? We are apt to ascribe our successes to ourselves, and our own conduct; but, doubtless, in a great measure, very unjustly. They are chiefly owing to Divine Providence, and the succours of Heaven; which conduct us, though unseen, and carry us on to prosperous events. Without these invisible aids, we should fail, and fall short, in almost every undertaking. No art, no skill, no diligence, would avail us, if Providence forlook us. It would only be *lost labour, that we hasted to rise early, and eat the bread of carefulness*, if we had nothing to trust to but our own endeavours. Nor could any of our fellow-creatures ensure our success. For, comparatively speaking, *vain is the help of man*, and precarious are all his purposes. But though human means be insufficient for the accomplishing of our ends, and the satisfying of our desires; yet what may we not expect from the interposition of Heaven, and the wisdom and bounty of God's providence? What good may we not hope for, if we be not wanting to ourselves? Whatever objects we set our hearts upon; whatever blessings we have in view; if they be fit for us, and we for them, we shall, in due time, assuredly obtain them. And is not this consideration abundantly sufficient to satisfy any reasonable mind? If any enjoyment be, in its consequences, mischievous to ourselves, we are false to our own interest if we desire it: and if it be detrimental to the public, we cannot innocently pretend to it. But under these limitations, our pursuits will not fail to be crowned with success. And what a happiness, what an honour, is it to the children of men, to have, I will not say such a governor, but such a patron, such a benefactor, such a friend? A friend whose power is commensurate to his wisdom, and his goodness to both. A friend, so kind and constant, as never to desert those who do not desert him. Whose favours are inestimable, and his bounty inexhaustible. In a word, on whom we entirely depend for all the blessings of this life, and all our hopes in the next. Upon the whole, to be under the divine rule and government, is the most desirable circumstance in the world. To be directed by infinite wis-

dom, protected by infinite power, and befriended by infinite goodness, is the happiest situation, and the most glorious privilege, that could belong either to men or angels.

What remains then, but that we cheerfully and thankfully submit to the authority of our heavenly Ruler? That we pay a constant regard, and a willing obedience, to his sacred laws; the violation of which is not only rebellion against God, but enmity against ourselves. By disobedience, and impenitence, we may turn the joy and gladness, spoken of in my text, into grief and terror. For most undoubtedly the *Judge of all the earth will do what is right*. He will not fail to execute judgment on obstinate and incorrigible offenders. But if we obey his laws, and keep his commandments; if we sincerely endeavour to fulfil his will, and discharge our duty; we are sure of his acceptance, encouragement, and favour. Most gently shall we be treated, most graciously indulged, and most abundantly rewarded. *No good thing will he withhold from his faithful subjects and servants. Happy then are all they who are in such a case; yea, blessed are the people who have the Lord for their God.*

S E R M O N VI.

The Conduct of the Bereans considered, and recommended to imitation.

ACTS, xvii. 11.

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind; and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

THE persons of whom my text makes this honourable mention, were the Jews of Berea, a city in Macedonia. Hither Paul and Silas, as we find in the foregoing verse, were sent by the brethren, to preach the word of God, and propagate the gospel; the great design which the Apostles every where pursued in so unwearied a manner. In the beginning of this chapter, we read they came to Thessalonica; where, *in a synagogue of the Jews, Paul reasoned with them out of the Scriptures; opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered; and risen again from the dead; and that*

that Jesus which he preached unto them was the Christ. How ill a reception he, and his assistant, here met with, we may learn from what immediately follows: *The Jews moved with envy, and assembled in a tumultuous manner, set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house in which these Apostles resided.* Paul and Silas were maliciously accused by them of acting contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, and setting up Jesus for a king in opposition to him. Such was the treatment which they met with from the Jews of Thessalonica. But the minds of the Bereans were differently affected, as being indeed more noble and generous. They were so far from committing the same riotous disorders; so far from giving any disturbance to Paul and Silas; that, as we read in the text, *they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so:* that is, whether the Apostles preaching was conformable to their Scriptures of the Old Testament; and how it agreed with the prophecies and declarations therein contained. In treating on these words, I shall,

First, Inquire into the conduct of the Bereans, as the ground of the applause here given them. And,

Secondly, Consider what is proper to be observed from thence for our own use and direction.

First, I am to inquire into the conduct of the Bereans, whereon is grounded the applause here given them. That they are here applauded is very manifest. For though, according to the literal meaning of my text, their behaviour is only represented as better than theirs in Thessalonica, which it might be without meriting any praise; yet, according to the usual construction of speech, we are to understand by the expression, that the Bereans were really praise-worthy; and that they behaved themselves upon this occasion in a wise and dutiful manner.—To proceed, therefore: One part of their conduct and character is, *that they received the word with all readiness of mind;* that is, they willingly and gladly gave ear to the Apostles doctrine, and were ready to embrace it, as soon as sufficient evidence of the truth of it should appear to them. In the mean time, they gave due attention, as became them; and as the weight and importance of the subject

required. They discovered no ill-will, no disaffection towards those that preached it to them; but heard them candidly and favourably, without prejudice or prepossession, and with minds open to conviction. As they were men, and reasonable creatures, they shewed themselves willing to be informed and instructed; and were fairly disposed to receive the truth, who ever offered it; especially such truth as appeared to be of the greatest moment, and immediately related to their duty and welfare. As they were sinful men, and transgressors, with the rest of the world, against the laws of God, they thought they had the utmost reason to listen joyfully to the tidings of a Saviour, who, as they were told, had redeemed all mankind from their sins, and expiated their guilt; who had, moreover, brought men salvation, and made known to them the way to eternal life. They were sensible this was a matter of the greatest consequence; and whether these tidings proved afterwards true or false, that they well deserved, in the mean time, their most serious attention and examination. Lastly, as they were Jews, to whom the promise of a Messiah was more immediately given, they looked upon themselves as particularly concerned to hearken to those who preached him to them; who declared, that he was actually come into the world, and had already answered the ends of his coming. Such an account as this ought to be peculiarly welcome to the Jews, as they were then expecting it with the utmost impatience. The Gentile world was not pre-acquainted with the great Author of their redemption and happiness; but sat in darkness and ignorance, not expecting a Saviour, and scarce knowing that they wanted one. But he had long before been revealed and promised to the Jews; to whom, therefore, the news of his arrival ought to be in a particular manner grateful and good. Accordingly, the Bereans acted like men that had a just sense of this matter; hearing the Apostles, and *receiving the word with all readiness of mind.* They only desired a reasonable proof and confirmation of this weighty truth; and to that they immediately applied themselves with great diligence and cheerfulness.

What further recommends their conduct, is their divesting themselves of those prejudices which possessed the generality of

of the Jews, and hung upon the minds of almost the whole nation. Their thoughts and expectations were wholly fixed on a secular Messiah, who, by force of arms, might rescue them from the Roman yoke, and reinstate them in their former grandeur and independence. Upon this account our Saviour, whose figure and appearance promised nothing like this, but rather the quite contrary, was rejected by them with great scorn and contempt. His completion of prophecies, the number and greatness of his miracles, the divineness of his doctrines, availed nothing with those, whose inclinations were immoveably fixed on a temporal deliverer. This then being the common disposition of the Jews, it was highly praiseworthy in the Bereans to lay it aside; to break through so general a prejudice, and give such a fair and impartial hearing to the Apostles.

The other part of the character, and the praise given them in my text, is, that they *searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so*. That is, examined whether the Apostles' declarations were conformable thereto; and whether the Messiah, now preached to them, answered the descriptions and characters given by the Prophets. Now, as hearing and receiving the word readily, shewed the honesty of their minds; so their thus *searching the Scriptures* is a proof of their wisdom and good understanding. How good and acceptable soever the Apostles' doctrine might be, it was certainly proper, before they embraced it, to satisfy themselves about the truth of it; that they might not expose themselves to delusion and disappointment. Without this, neither could their joy be reasonable, nor their faith well-grounded. Though they readily heard the Apostles, and gave attention to their preaching, they knew it was not fitting to give their assent, without previous satisfaction, and proper evidence. And herein likewise their proceeding was manly and rational, and such as became lovers of truth. As to that particular way wherein they sought satisfaction, it was manifestly the most secure that could have been taken by Jews. They had a former revelation in their custody, and could admit of no other that appeared contradictory thereto, or inconsistent therewith. So far, therefore, they were under a necessity of trying the

Apostles' doctrine by that rule, and bringing it to that test. But, further, the expected Messiah was spoken of in their own Scriptures. Their Prophets had pointed him out, and described him at large; setting forth his person and appearance, under a great variety of circumstances; and laying down many marks and signs by which he might be known, whenever he should arrive. It was therefore necessary to examine, whether those prophecies were fulfilled, and those descriptions answered in him, whom the Apostles now preached to them. On this account it was, that they *searched the Scriptures*; and it appears from my text, and from the nature of the thing, that this part of their conduct likewise was good and laudable. Upon the whole, we see how the Bereans merited the praise here given them. They readily gave ear to the Apostles' doctrine, and then examined it in a proper manner: being neither backward to give attention, nor hasty in surrendering up their belief, they happily avoided the extremes of obstinacy and credulity. I come now, in the

Second place, to consider what we are to observe from hence for our own use and direction. First, then, we cannot but observe, that the Bereans are a fit pattern for our imitation, in respect of the good disposition which they shewed for the reception of truth. Truth in general is the food of our minds; and therefore it must be unnatural, as well as unreasonable, to be negligent and indifferent about it. We ought to maintain a perpetual inclination for it; and gladly to give it admittance whenever it is offered. If our faculty of understanding be valuable in a high degree, as we universally acknowledge it is, it must be upon account of the excellence of its object. In vain are we capable of coming to the knowledge of truth, if we take no care to obtain it. If incapacity be a misfortune, yet, however, it is no crime; but voluntary ignorance is both; as implying an abuse of a talent that God has given us. And as we ought to be well-affected towards truth in general, so more especially ought we to regard such truth, as is of the greatest consequence, and affects our highest interest. Now religious truth claims the preference of all others; because religion is the first and greatest concern we have. The prosperity of
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our souls depends upon it: to discover the true religion, is to find out the way to eternal life. This, therefore, merits above all things our care and attention. In order to obtain the favour of God, and the happiness consequent thereupon, it is necessary that we discharge those duties which are incumbent on us. And in order thereto, we must know what they are, and what it is that God expects from us. If he has fixed certain terms and conditions of salvation, and pointed out a way wherein we are to walk, it highly concerns us to be rightly informed about this matter. And if we have means and opportunities of knowing it, and yet remain ignorant, that ignorance must be inexcusable. In short, whatever way God is pleased to communicate his will to us, we must attend to it reverently, and receive it with all readiness of mind.

But, secondly, we should do well to imitate the Bereans in their impartial and unprejudiced manner of proceeding. In vain do we hearken with due attention, if we be any way disabled, or indisposed for passing a right judgment on what we hear. Now prejudices in the understanding are the same obstacle to the nourishment of the mind, that disorders in the stomach are to the sustenance of the body. A readiness to hear and learn, without an impartial disposition, is only an appetite without a power of digestion. And as this must needs produce ill effects in general, so it is peculiarly mischievous in respect of the truths of religion; the importance of these being infinitely greater than any other. The knowledge of our duty is necessary in order to the performance of it; and, on the performance of it, our security and welfare ultimately depend. We cannot here err with impunity, if our errors be in any degree wilful; as those generally are which spring from prejudice and partiality. Without doubt, it is ordinarily in our power to keep our minds rightly disposed; and supposing it otherwise in any case, yet our utmost endeavours must be used before we can be entitled to such a plea. In short, it concerns us to take all possible care, that we intercept not the light of heaven, nor disqualify ourselves for the reception of the saving truths of our most holy religion. Not as *lovers of darkness*, hardening our minds against conviction; not *corrupting the word of God*,

or *perverting the gospel of Christ*; but receiving the truth in the love thereof, with simplicity and singleness of heart. But,

Thirdly, From the character here given the Bereans, we may learn the folly and absurdity of implicit faith. That is, of blindly surrendering up our belief without previous inquiry, and due examination. For those men are applauded in my text for taking a quite contrary method. They did not embrace the Apostles doctrines till they had brought them to the test, and compared them with the Scriptures, their acknowledged rule of faith. And this we find was a laudable practice. From hence then it follows very plainly, that implicit faith is so far from being our duty, that it is in reality blameable, and therefore to be avoided. How hard is it then, that such a faith as this should nevertheless be required by the Romish church of all its members? How strange and shocking, that any body of Christians should be enjoined to believe implicitly, and blindly; when the praise of the Bereans is upon record in Scripture for refusing to believe so?

If it be said, that the Bereans were at years of maturity before they were profelyted to the Christian faith, and that upon this account their case was quite different from that of modern believers, who are generally admitted into the church in their infancy, and by consequence incapable of passing any judgment; I answer, that those who are admitted in their infancy, are nevertheless obliged, as soon as they come to age, to satisfy themselves, as far as they are able, concerning the truth of that religion into which they are brought, and the purity of that church to which they belong. Otherwise, they profess they know not what, and believe they know not why. If a man can give no better reason why he is a Christian, or why he is a Romanist, than that he was brought up such; he says no more for himself, than what may be said by a Pagan or a Mahometan.

But it is alleged by the Romish church, that its members have infallibility to rely on; and therefore may securely believe, without examination, whatever articles of faith are imposed on them. The falsity of this pretence has been proved even to demonstration. However, supposing it otherwise, it is certain, that the Apostles were infallible in what they taught; as
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being directed by the infallible spirit of God. How happens it then, that the Bereans are nevertheless commended for examining the Apostles doctrine before they embraced it, and for proving it by a rule which they have in custody? I presume it will be said, that they were not yet convinced of the Apostles infallibility, and therefore could have no regard to it. To bring this to the present case, is there not equal reason, that the members of the Romish church should be convinced of its infallibility, before they trust to it? How then is this point to be proved, or where is such conviction to be met with? Why the Scriptures are appealed to in proof of it; but whether in earnest, or in mockery, is hard to say. For how is it possible for those men to find satisfaction about it in the Scriptures, who are not allowed so much as to look into them? The case therefore is plainly this—they must believe all the articles of their supposed faith, because their church is infallible; and they must believe their church is infallible, because it tells them so. What a foundation is here for implicit faith? Thus then we plainly see how diametrically opposite the conduct of the Romish church is to that of the Apostles: by the one, men are commended for opening and searching the Scriptures; by the other, they are commanded to shut them.

But to return: Nothing is to be found in the Scriptures, that even seems to countenance implicit faith. *Beloved*, says the Apostle, *believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God. Prove all things, says another, hold fast that which is good.* These, and many other declarations of a like nature, are utterly irreconcilable with such a faith as we are speaking of. As all true religion is, and must be, a reasonable service; so pure and undefiled Christianity, the more it is proved and examined, the better it will be esteemed, and the greater satisfaction it will surely give. If any of its professors be jealous of having their doctrines examined, and brought to light, they may have good reason perhaps to apprehend danger. They may be afraid, perhaps, of having their beloved errors detected, or their profitable corruptions exposed. Let them therefore be jealous, who have cause to be so. We have no grounds for any such fears or apprehensions. Pure and uncorrupted Christianity

dreads no trial that is fair, no examination that is honest; but invites men to search into it, and even acknowledges those to be its best votaries, who search into it the deepest; provided they do it sincerely, and in a proper manner. Did the Apostles apprehend any ill consequence from the inquiries and examinations of the Bereans? or did they discountenance them in any degree? On the contrary, we find those men are highly commended for such a rational proceeding, and their name transmitted to posterity with honour and applause. We may justly, therefore, look upon them as a proper pattern for our imitation, both in respect of their impartiality and their integrity. Our religion we profess only to derive from reason and Scripture; and thither we refer men for the discovery of its truth and excellence; not doubting but it will ever be found strictly conformable to both. It is a disgrace to Christianity not to suffer it to be examined; and it is a double disgrace to it to shut up the Scriptures by which it is to be examined.

It must indeed be confessed, that men may make an ill use of the holy Scriptures, and even *wrest them to their own destruction*. But does it follow, that the generality of Christians ought to be deprived of them upon that account? What good thing is there in the world which may not be abused and perverted? All the blessings of life, nay, our very senses and understandings, might be forfeited by this rule; forasmuch as all these are sometimes abused and misemployed. It is indeed remarkable, that the same authority which forbids men the free use of the Scriptures, condemns also the free use of their understandings; and even requires them to disbelieve their senses. And what wonder if they, who take away the light of revelation, do likewise endeavour to extinguish the light of nature?

But to return: Since it is acknowledged, that we may make an ill use of the Scriptures, it certainly concerns us, in a very particular manner, to beware of so doing. A great part of them is so plain, as to be intelligible to the most ordinary capacities. Other parts are less plain, and some even difficult and abstruse to every reader. And though we ought not to be debarred the study even of these, yet if we have not that capacity, and those acquired talents, which are requisite for

the unfolding of them, it is neither reasonable nor safe to pretend to it. Though it be every Christian's undoubted privilege to judge for himself, yet certainly that privilege is abused, when men take upon them to judge in such cases as are quite out of their reach. It can never be required of any man, that he should understand those parts of Scripture, of the meaning of which he finds himself utterly unqualified to form any judgment. In these cases he ought to suspend, and determine nothing; as being the wisest and securest course he can take. In like manner, those who are better qualified to judge, make an ill use of Scripture, when they apply themselves to the interpretation of it with prejudice and prepossession; when, instead of inquiring sincerely for the true sense of it, they endeavour to bend and accommodate it to their own preconceived opinions: such a proceeding being utterly inconsistent with that love of truth, and that deference for inspiration, which are indispensably required of all Christians. Lastly, we must carefully avoid the spirit of cavilling and contention; not seeking for occasions of wrangling and unnecessary disputations; but soberly and impartially searching for the truth, and acquiescing in it when found. In short, we must study the Scriptures with no other aim, no other view, but that of instruction; imploring at the same time the assistance of that Spirit, by which they were inspired. Thus they will be read not only with safety, but great benefit; and, by the blessing of God, and our own honest endeavours, *make us wise unto salvation.*

SERMON VII.

The natural Advantages of a virtuous Course of Life.

PSALM xix. part of the 11th verse.

And in keeping of them there is great reward.

THE rewards annexed to the keeping of God's commandments, are either natural or supernatural. I shall confine myself at present to the former; and endeavour to point out those comforts and enjoyments, which, according to the established course of things, virtue does commonly afford men in this life.

To bound and direct our sight in so wide a subject, let it be observed, that the goods of life, being all relative either to our souls or bodies, must be entirely comprehended in the enjoyments of sense, and the satisfactions of the mind: in reference to which I shall briefly examine the tendencies and operations of virtue and religion. The foundation of the former class is health, which very much affects also the latter. We know but too well, that, when out of health, we can neither rightly enjoy ourselves, nor any thing about us. In sickness we languish, and in pain we lament; while our senses are blunted, and our faculties disabled. The objects without us court us in vain; and to those within, we are not in a condition to attend. But this is a point so plain, that it neither needs proof nor enlargement. Since therefore health is thus essential, whatever tends to its support and security, must undoubtedly be so far valuable. And is not this most evidently the case of a virtuous course of life? Does any man want to be informed, that temperance, sobriety, and moderation, directly tend to the preservation of life and health? And is it not most notorious, that intemperance and excess are continually kindling distempers, and undermining men's constitutions? Contracting their span, short as it is, and cutting off many years from the thread of life; by indulging the cravings of appetite, and living upon the stretch, men not only shorten, but embitter their days; exposing themselves to many troublesome disorders, and tormenting sensations. Whereas temperance and regularity are not only inoffensive in this respect, but greatly beneficial; not only protecting men's constitutions, and guarding the springs of life, but promoting the freedom and purity of their spirits, and thereby enabling them to act with more alacrity and vigour.

On this foundation then let us proceed, and inquire, whether even men's sensitive enjoyments be not really promoted by a virtuous course of life. Such a tendency as this may perhaps be thought by some a disparagement to virtue. But if any are so delicate as to object this, they ought to consider, that whenever virtue improves the pleasures of sense, it refines and purifies them at the same time, by reducing them to the order of nature and reason.

reason. It is not the use, but the abuse, of sensible goods that makes them dishonourable. In themselves they cannot be reputed base and contemptible, without a reflection on the original Author. But the sensual man, whose opinion runs into another extreme, wants to be convinced, that virtue really has such an effect. Pleasure is the very motive which engages and fixes him in his vicious courses; and he doubts not but he enjoys a greater share of this, whatever other advantages he may forego for the sake of it. But there is good reason to believe, that even in this point he is greatly deceived; and that if his, and the virtuous man's, pleasures were fairly compared and computed, the balance would turn very much against him. One ground of this supposition is deducible from the foregoing observation: I mean, the difference in point of health, and length of days. For in proportion as the voluptuary's life is shortened, or made unhealthy, his pleasure must needs be diminished; the sum of his enjoyments being both ways lessened; by the one in quantity, and by the other in quality. But further: Licentious courses not only shorten men's lives, and cause frequent interruptions of pain and sickness; but, in some measure, disqualify them for those very enjoyments which they so eagerly pursue. All unnatural excesses, all inordinate gratifications, damp men's faculties, dull their senses, and deaden their enjoyments: and, in proportion to the degree of their indulgence, their relish always decreases. What is luxury, but an unnatural art of stupifying men's taste, and spoiling their appetites? It may multiply and mix objects without measure, and without end; but, after all, nature will neither be mocked, nor managed, by the capricious rules of fancy and fashion: and whoever attempt it, must lose one way more than they can possibly gain another. Let men tamper with their inclinations, and whet their appetites in the most exorbitant manner; the consequence will be, instead of continued pleasure, frequent disgust; instead of satisfaction, a surfeit. Whereas the plain man, who lives according to nature, both in the choice and the measure of his gratifications, has all the benefit that nature designed him. Hence it is, that his sensations are pure and genuine, and his plea-

tures quick and lively. He neither wants nor covets the helps of art, and the stimulations of luxury. In short, by immoderate indulgence, the appetite sickens, and grows squeamish; catching at every thing, and relishing nothing: but temperance and moderation preserve its natural edge, and thereby heighten every enjoyment. Again: Where is the pleasure of deluging a man's constitution, and drowning his senses, in a flood of intemperance; thereby converting into an oppressive load, what nature meant for relief and refreshment? Can that be called a pleasure, which does violence to a man's whole frame; which deprives him of the use of his reason and himself, and renders him so justly obnoxious to the scorn and derision of all about him? This the temperate man sees, and pities; and is the more confirmed in his abhorrence of so unmanly a practice. He pretends not to be deaf to the calls of nature, and the just demands of a regular appetite; but makes a wide difference between quenching his thirst, and kindling a flame; between recruiting his spirits, and running riot. And he has not only reason and nature on his side, but even pleasure. Not that spurious pleasure which results from forced appetites, and artificial cravings; but such as always flows from a natural desire duly gratified. It may be looked upon as a certain truth, that, by plunging men into great excesses, and gross disorders, vice always hinders more enjoyment than it procures. And what it does procure is so clogged and encumbered, that the pleasure is seldom sufficient to balance the trouble. Whereas innocent gratifications are clear, and easy, and free from draw-backs: obtained without trouble, enjoyed without perplexity, and reflected on without remorse. How wretched a scheme then does the libertine follow! who sacrifices the present peace and comfort of his mind, and all his hopes, pretensions, and prospects hereafter, to that bewitching idol, sensuality; and yet is so far from adding to his share of pleasure, and improving it to the utmost, that he very much lessens, and often destroys it: thereby purchasing, at the highest price in the world, mere loss and disadvantage. So deceitful is sin, and so deluded is the sinner! On the other hand, though virtue and religion do, in some instances, abridge the plea-

tures of sense; yet they encrease them in the main, and improve them upon the whole; making men ample amends for all the rules and restraints which they bring upon them. Even self-denial, on certain occasions, at the same time that it answers nobler purposes, promotes this very end, and produces superior gratification.

But it may further be inquired, whether virtue or vice be more effectual in procuring the means of obtaining such enjoyments? or, in other words, whether is more conducive to the improvement of men's condition and circumstances, and the advancement of their fortunes? a point commonly apprehended of the utmost consequence. In relation hereto it may be objected to the cause of virtue, that it condemns fraud and falsehood, as well as violence and rapine; utterly discouraging all sinister measures, and indirect arts of gain. Now this charge is admitted, and this further concession made, that many fortunes have been improved, and many estates raised, by these means: yet, it is to be hoped, without any disparagement or disadvantage to the cause of virtue. Prosperity and success in this world may be considered as the natural reward of industry, merely as such, and on its own account. But the question is, whether honest industry will not ordinarily go further, and succeed better, than dishonest? As to which, whatever convenience, or advantage, men may find, or think they find, in fraud, craft, and circumvention; yet how light must it weigh against honest measures, and upright dealings? One of the main hinges on which human prosperity turns, and ever will turn, is a fair reputation, and a clear character; in possession of which, the fraudulent and unjust man seldom long continues. And when he is once found out, and his character blasted, he must be fortunate indeed, if he do not find himself at a stand; or if he be able to surmount so great an obstacle to success. Whereas the upright man, if we suppose him to have the same abilities and opportunities, finds his way smooth and open, and walketh in it surely and successfully. His integrity supports him, and his clear reputation carries him through. Every man likes and wishes to deal with him; because they can do it without distrust,

without jealousy, without suspicion. Surely then it may be affirmed, that virtuous courses, and direct dealings, have a better effect, and contribute more to make men thrive in the world, than all the crooked arts of guile and falsehood. But, supposing it otherwise, there is one sort of success peculiar to virtue, which it never fails to procure, and that is contentment. For contentment, with a mere competency, is real prosperity. Men are very apt to imagine, that the good things of this world are most unequally divided; and indeed, in some sense, so they are, and ought to be; but we forget how far this difference is balanced by the equality of our nature. If life entirely consisted in the abundance of possession, and men's enjoyments were proportionable to their fortunes; then, it must be owned, the disparities of this life would be very great. But this is far from being the case. For, not to insist here on the independent goods of the mind, almost equally in every one's power; even the gratifications of the body are not to be had in any such proportion. For however men's fortunes may differ, their sensitive powers are nearly equal; and beyond these there is no enjoyment. For nature will not be driven out of her course without inconvenience and damage. As her demands are moderate, so her capacities are stinted. And whoever puts them to the stretch in any considerable degree, instead of gaining by it, is sure to suffer. Whatever affluence, therefore, men may possess, they can only enjoy within those bounds which nature has prescribed. From whence it follows, that there is no such mighty difference between sufficiency and superfluity as is generally imagined. I may add, that the former, with moderate desires, and a contented mind, is greatly preferable to the latter without them.

Having briefly considered the external advantages of virtue and religion, I proceed to consider the internal, which relate solely to the mind. And here it is, in a more especial manner, that virtue reigns and triumphs. Though it tends, as we have seen, to procure men sensitive goods, yet it lays but small stress on them. So far from it, that it rather aims to wean us from them, and turn our thoughts and affections, as much as may be, to the

the enjoyments of the mind. And how-
ever vice may be thought to rival it in
the former respect; yet, as to the latter,
it has no power, no pretensions at all.
Its province is sensation, and that of the
worst and meanest sort; but as to reflec-
tion, it is so far from improving or re-
commending it, that it cannot endure
it. On the contrary, religion not only
requires it in the strictest manner, but
presents the mind with a great variety of
the noblest objects, and worthy, above
all others, of its contemplation and
study. If we have any inclination to
think, what more inviting than the per-
fections and operations of the great Crea-
tor? The multiplicity and majesty of his
works! the dispensations of his provi-
dence, and the wonders of his grace!
What a subject for our meditation, the
eternal system of his moral law! which
threw the royal Psalmist into such pious
raptures, and produced such sublime
strains of admiration and devotion,
thanksgiving and praise! Or, if we ex-
tend our thoughts to futurity, and lift
them up to that heavenly state, where
religion is to glorify and crown her vo-
taries, what a prospect! what a scene!
could we but look behind the veil, and
turn faith into vision. Joys and glories
unspeakable, inconceivable! never in-
terrupted, never fading; but growing
and improving through the bound-
less ages of eternity! Such ideas, such
objects, religion spreads before us, and
offers to our contemplation. Objects,
the least glimpse of which does honour to
the mind of man, and might seem to af-
ford it a peculiar satisfaction.

Let it suffice to have barely hinted at
the speculative part of religion, that we
may sooner turn our thoughts to the
practical. And here it may deserve to
be considered, whether the discharge of
our duty, the *keeping of God's command-
ments*, be not, in some measure, rewarded
here, though chiefly and more abundantly
hereafter. On the government of
ourselves, and a regular conduct of
our own minds, the enjoyment of life
very much depends. Hereby we main-
tain our tranquillity and our liberty, with-
out which the best of this world's goods
are of small value. Fierce appetites, and
tumultuous passions, break the peace of
the mind every moment, and throw all
its powers into disorder and confusion.

They urge their demands in a high
strain, and every thing is carried on with
insolence and clamour. By extravagant
terms and concessions perhaps a truce
may be gained; but it seldom proves of
any continuance; and almost any thing
serves to revive these intestine commo-
tions. We are assured *there is no peace to
the wicked*; and, by consequence, no
true pleasure: but, supposing them in
possession of both, how precarious would
it be? The least gust of passion, or gale
of humour, would sweep them away in
an instant. There can be no steadiness,
no stability, in a vicious dissolute mind;
which, like a ship without rudder, and
without anchor, is continually tossed, and
driven about; floating at the mercy of
every wave that swells, and every wind
that blows. On the other hand, virtue
produces a calm, serene, and composed
state; unshaken by turbulent appetites,
and inordinate affections. This tranquil-
lity of mind is the natural effect of due
government and discipline; which is ever
the case where reason sits at the helm,
exerting its authority, and keeping
the animal powers in just subjection.
Hence arises likewise the secure posses-
sion of our moral liberty, and that in-
dependence of mind, which is so essen-
tially necessary to a happy state. Un-
disciplined passions, and irregular desires,
are insupportable masters; and no bond-
age is equal to that of submitting to their
rule and government. They engage a
man in the basest and most servile em-
ployments, expose him to continual dis-
appointments, and involve him in end-
less vexations. So capricious they are,
as never to be satisfied; and so obstinate,
as to defy all counsel. Hence reason is
pronounced useless, and wisdom imper-
tinent: and the result is, that the un-
happy man is led astray, and dragged
backward and forward, till he find him-
self utterly bewildered in the mazes of
sin and folly. On the contrary, a virtu-
ous mind is the seat of order, and the
habitation of liberty. There reason and
religion preside and govern, and the in-
ferior principles are tame and tractable;
neither making opposition, nor foment-
ing discord. Hence every thing moves
with ease, and the dictates of the under-
standing are regularly executed. And
herein consists the true freedom of the
mind, which is the foundation of all enjoy-
ment.

ment. Must it not then be a great recommendation of virtue, that it strikes off men's fetters, and delivers them from so cruel and shameful a servitude? That it brings them out of such perplexity and confusion, and reduces their minds to a state of order, harmony, and concord? Had they not infinitely better be ruled by reason and conscience, than by mad lusts and brutal appetites? To be guided by religion is to be governed by Him, whose *service is perfect freedom*: whose laws are nothing more than gracious and wise rules for perfecting our natures, and procuring our true happiness. What therefore more suitable, or more desirable, than to conform ourselves cheerfully to his will, and walk in the way of his commandments.

Again: Another main branch of our duty, is benevolence and charity towards all mankind. And it is needful to shew, that this yields more pleasure, more comfort and complacency, than a contrary disposition? Is any thing to be said, or imagined, in behalf of envy, hatred, malice, revenge, the very bitterness of life, and the bane of all enjoyment? Even an indifference, a mere want of concern, for the welfare of our fellow-creatures, must be an unnatural, insipid, joyless state of mind: as being indeed repugnant to the frame and first principles of human nature. But universal benevolence is a constant source of pure satisfaction, and sincere delight: most pleasing in the exercise, and no less grateful in the remembrance. This is an enjoyment not only worthy of men, and of angels, but of God himself; who is therefore infinitely blessed, because infinitely good. By opening our hearts to the whole creation, we effectually consult our own bliss; a bliss commencing that moment, and enduring for ever. Hereby we secure an interest in every good that befalls, and the public prosperity is ours. By rejoicing at the happiness of others, we are sure to partake with them; and the more we sympathize, the larger is our share. To be convinced that this good is not imaginary, but real, we need only reflect on domestic benevolence, which nature has inseparably united to self-love. It is easy to conceive, that virtuous affection, when duly improved, will operate in the same way towards the public, that natural af-

fection does towards a man's own household: however they may, at present, differ in degree, though that is not always the case, yet the former is as real as the latter, and the satisfaction resulting from it proportionable. In short, benevolence and public spirit is never barren, never fruitless, in respect of the owner; but always productive of the purest pleasure, and the noblest enjoyment.

But further: The chief branch of our duty remains to be considered, and the great pleasure and consolation arising from it: I mean, an habitual reverence and gratitude towards God: an object so transcendent, as never to be thought of, in a proper manner, without pious admiration, and devout astonishment. To admire and adore a Being of infinite perfection, is an employment so natural and reasonable, and so conducive to the honour and improvement of human nature, that it cannot fail of yielding peculiar satisfaction to all well-disposed minds. Especially when He is considered, not only as the possessor of all perfection, but as the author and preserver of our beings; as the dispenser of all blessings, and the giver of all good. From Him we derive, and to Him we are indebted for all our powers; all our enjoyments, and all our hopes: favours and mercies above estimation, and beyond the power of numbers! If then it be, as the Psalmist expresses it, *a joyful and pleasant thing to be thankful*; how much more to such a Benefactor! How insensible, how obdurate, must the heart of man be, if so great goodness will not warm it, nor so many benefits pierce it? But this is a subject too copious for the conclusion of a discourse. I shall therefore only add at present, that if our love and gratitude towards God bore any proportion to our obligations; virtue and piety would need no praise, religion no advocate.

Would the time have permitted, I should also have observed, what valuable fruits immediately spring up from the practice of virtue; as the pleasing approbation of a man's own mind, and the comfortable gratulations of his conscience; on having answered, in a good measure, the end of his creation, maintained the dignity of his nature, and revered the image of God imprinted on his soul: I should

I should have considered him as possessed of the esteem of all wise and good men, and doubly entitled to the good offices of all: and what is the perfection of all honour, and the crown of true glory, as enjoying the approbation, esteem, and favour of God himself; who is our supreme unerring judge, immutably determined by right and truth. And hence it is, that we derive that principal comfort of life, which lies at the root of all our enjoyments; viz. a lively hope, a firm expectation of that future good, that mighty reward, which neither God's perfections, nor his promises, will suffer us to doubt. This is the great rest and support, the consolation and triumph, of all virtuous minds; which softens every pain, and sweetens every pleasure. If religion dropped men in the grave, and made no provision beyond it; though it would still be much preferable to vice and irreligion, yet it would be infinitely less valuable than it is. Sin and guilt may make men afraid of another life; but, excepting this case, who could bear the thoughts of losing his being, and perishing for ever! Short is our span here upon earth; and if it was our all, we could have no great reason to boast. But since we are assured of another state; and that other state not only full of bliss and glory, but of endless duration; what can be left us to wish, besides a secure title? And how can we fail of a title, if we obey God, and keep his commandments. This is the indispensable condition of obtaining that great reward. In the mean time, the present advantages of virtue are, we see, by no means contemptible. It is surely no small matter, that it is attended with such real comfort and satisfaction; that it prevents so much evil, and procures so much good: in a word, that *its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace.*

S E R M O N VIII.

Of Diligence in our temporal Concerns.

ROMANS, xii. former part of 11th verse.

Not slothful in business.

EVERY man has two general concerns upon his hands of great weight and moment, answerable to the two kinds of

existence through which he is to pass: namely, the present life, and that which is to come: for both which it is incumbent on him to make suitable provision. The one is indeed of much greater importance than the other, and therefore merits a proportionable share of his endeavours. The affair of the next life, or the business of eternity, is of infinite consequence, and requires our utmost diligence and care. Nevertheless the concerns of this world are by no means to be neglected. A due attendance upon these is not inconsistent with the prosecution of the other; but, on the contrary, tends to further and promote it. Worldly industry, under proper restraints and regulations, is a great friend to religion and virtue; as I shall have occasion to observe more at large in the progress of this discourse. For which reason it cannot be a subject unworthy of our consideration. And indeed the caution in my text relates wholly to it. The meaning of which is, that men must, by no means, give themselves up to idleness or sloth; but must diligently pursue their respective vocations, and be industrious in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call them.

I shall not offer, upon this subject, to mark out the bounds and limits of industry, or to shew precisely to what measure and degree men are to be diligent in their several ways of life. That is not perhaps possible to be done, considering men's different circumstances and conditions, which require different degrees of industry and labour. Some are obliged to take more pains, and to be more laborious, than others; whose condition of life exempts them from so great a degree of toil, by making it neither necessary nor expedient. However, idleness is the privilege of none: it is criminal in all, and prejudicial to all, in many respects. But of this more hereafter. In the mean time, it must be observed, that worldly industry is capable of being carried to excess, not only as it may become detrimental to health, which is comparatively but a small consideration; but as it may entrench upon the concerns of the other life; which being, as I took notice before, of far the greatest moment, must in no wise be broken in upon by any concerns belonging to this.

Thus then our application to worldly business must be limited and confined. We must make our spiritual calling and election sure, whatever become of our temporal callings. But to shew more particularly how far men ought to be diligent and industrious in their respective employments, is neither possible nor needful. Every one may know how to apply the general precept to his own case and circumstances. If a man is but convinced, that he ought to be industrious, and is thereupon resolved so to be, he will discover readily enough how to proportion his industry to his condition and state of life. I shall content myself therefore with endeavouring to persuade men to comply in general with the caution in my text, by shewing the necessity of industry, and the several advantages which belong to it.

In order to which it must be considered, that the world cannot subsist without labour and pains. Some indeed may be excused, and ever will be exempted, from the drudging part of business; but still even these cannot be wholly idle and unemployed, without damage to the public, as well as disadvantage to themselves. However, the generality of mankind must labour. The necessities of life require a great deal of pains, and the comforts and conveniences of it require much more. God could indeed, if he had so pleased, have maintained the world without men's labour: He could have made such provision for them, as would have supplied all their wants, and furnished all their occasions, without any contribution of their endeavours. The earth might have been made to have yielded its increase of its own accord, and have poured out its fruits without any human care or cultivation. Every climate might have abounded with whatever could be desired for use or ornament, without any dependance on others. In a word, nature might have been made so rich and fruitful in every respect, as to have rendered art useless, and labour superfluous. But Providence was pleased to order matters otherwise; and we may be sure upon very weighty and important accounts. Considering the corruptions of human nature, such a state of ease and of freedom from employment might have been fatal. Had man indeed continued innocent and pure as he was created,

there would not have been that necessity for labour which there is at present. Accordingly our first parents were exempted before the fall. While they remained in paradise, they were provided with every thing purely by the bounty of nature. The willing earth produced without care or culture, whatever could administer to use or delight. But this privilege they lost, when they lost their innocence, and, by incurring guilt, they subjected themselves to labour. It was part of Adam's curse, that he should *eat bread in the sweat of his face*: which obligation devolved in course upon his guilty posterity. It appears indeed from hence, that human labour has but an ignoble original. But then, this makes nothing for the credit of idleness. For had man continued innocent, though he would not have been condemned to labour, yet he would have been far from living in sloth. His active nature would not have suffered him to have been unemployed, nor would employment have been wanting. But then it would have been of a finer and nobler kind, than that which a great part of men's endeavours are taken up with at present. The works of the creation, and the unsearchable nature and perfection of the Creator, would have found abundant exercise for the faculties of his mind: and there would then have been both more leisure, and more inclination, as well as greater capacity, for so sublime an employment. So that the punishment of the above-mentioned curse consisted in the exchange of business, as it may be called; the exercise of the mind, for the labour of the body. Not that the former has wholly ceased, but that it is very much encroached upon by the latter. And, in the present circumstances of mankind, it is very necessary that it should be so, both in a natural and a moral respect. Labour is, we see, necessary in a natural sense; because, since man's expulsion out of paradise, nature calls for his endeavours, and will not furnish him upon any other terms with such of her blessings as he most stands in need of. And, in a moral respect, labour is, in a great measure, necessary to keep him out of worse employment. In his present corrupt state, had he not worldly business to engage a good part of his thoughts, he would be very apt to let them run out upon

upon what was unlawful. He has such a great aversion to what is good, and such a strong propensity to what is evil, that it is necessary for him to be frequently taken up, and employed, about what is indifferent. But this point will be more fully considered under the next head, wherein I proposed to shew the advantages of industry, and the danger and disadvantage of being *slothful in business*, as it is worded in my text.

I shall begin with those temporal advantages which flow from industry, and then proceed to shew the good influence which it has upon our spiritual interest. To justify my insisting on the former of these, I desire it may be considered, that in holy writ we meet with frequent recommendations of industry drawn from this very topic: particularly by the wise man, who dwells much upon it. We may take notice then in the first place, how much the public is indebted to industry and diligence. To this are owing the birth and improvement of arts and sciences, which contribute so much both to the use and embellishment of life, and serve to lift men up so much above inferior ranks of creatures. Accordingly those nations which have made but little progress therein, are found to be barbarous and uncivilized; the countries wild and desolate, and the men savages. Great and numberless are the advantages which men derive from arts and sciences, and consequently from industry, by which they are both begun and carried on. An industrious people may not indeed always prosper and flourish, because they may lie under the disadvantage of an unhappy government, or other inconveniencies, which may keep them low, and disappoint their diligence. But there cannot be a flourishing people without industry, whatever other advantages they may be possessed of. For without this, the benefits of nature must be, in a great measure lost, and the blessings of Providence thrown away. There are flourishing nations in the world, that wholly owe their power and prosperity, next to the blessing of Heaven, to their being remarkably industrious, which has raised and advanced them, in spite of many great obstacles and discouraging difficulties that stood in the way. And there are other nations, which, notwithstanding many and great natural advantages, have never

distinguished themselves, for want of taking the pains necessary thereto. Their sloth has kept them down, and buried them in obscurity: or perhaps they have become a prey to other more active nations, and been spoiled of their riches, as well as deprived of their liberty. Those natural blessings which they let lie unimproved, have tempted others to invade and over-run their country. And thus they have fallen a public sacrifice to their own sloth and inactivity. As liberty is a great promoter and encourager of industry, so industry is the best guard to liberty. Strength and power avail nothing, if they be not exerted; and exerted they cannot be to advantage, without pains and industry. Thus sloth naturally tends to slavery, as well as poverty. Nor is it any wonder that Providence should frequently suffer those hands to be tied, which would not work when they were at liberty. An industrious people have the best title to the protection of Heaven, whilst the lazy are left destitute, and abandoned to the ill effects of their own sluggishness. *The hand of the diligent shall bear rule, says the wise man, but the slothful shall be under tribute.*

Having thus briefly touched upon the advantages of industry with relation to the public, I shall now consider the temporal advantages which accrue from it to particular persons. The tendency which it has to raise men in the world is so clear and manifest, that it is needless to insist upon it. Ordinarily speaking, it is the only way to wealth, which cannot be acquired without it. Men indeed may inherit riches, and be wealthy that way without pains. But even then without industry they cannot improve them, nor perhaps keep what they have. And, besides, idleness naturally brings them into such courses as tend to waste their fortunes, and reduce them to want. And as to those who have their fortunes to make, they must necessarily take pains. They may as well pretend to be wise without instruction, as rich without diligence. If a man's condition be very low, he must labour for a subsistence: and if it be moderate, he must be industrious, if he will advance it. This is too evident to need a proof. He must needs *become poor that dealeth with a slack hand*, according to Solomon's observation, *but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.*

rich. And as men thus get by being diligent, so they thrive in a double respect. The same royal author tells us, that *the substance of a diligent man is precious.* His diligence first brings him in gain, and then contributes to secure it when it is got. He whose wealth is of his own acquiring, is likeliest to understand the value of it. He knows how he got it, and will therefore know how he spends it. Thus his substance will wear well, and make a better proof upon this account. Besides, the blessing of Heaven goes along with his labours, and prospers his endeavours. What is got by honest industry, has the protection of Providence for its security. And this matter has confirmation from the mouth of the same author; *Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished; but he that gathereth by labour shall increase.* Honour likewise, as well as wealth, must be obtained by these means. Industry is the high road to preferment, which, ordinarily speaking, cannot be arrived at any other way. *Seest thou,* says the same wise prince, *a man diligent in his business, he shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before mean men.*

As industry makes men prosper in the world, and advances their conditions, so perhaps it might not be improper to add, that it contributes to the preservation of health. Human bodies are framed after such a manner, as to stand in constant need of exercise. And no doubt this was contrived so by Providence, on purpose to keep them in employment. We may look upon it as a natural check upon sloth, and a kind of security to the pursuit of business, that no motive whatsoever might be wanting to spur man on to that labour and industry for which he was designed. There is no doubt but business may be immoderately followed, and that a man may be sometimes too industrious, and thereby prejudice himself in this respect. And so may any virtue run into an extreme, and there lose itself. This is no disparagement to industry, when governed by the rules of discretion. Moderate labour is nevertheless beneficial, or rather necessary. Those who are skilled in the nature of human bodies do assign reasons for it, and shew how it comes to pass. It is universally confessed, that sloth is an enemy to health, and moderate labour or exercise very advantageous. And this truth is abundantly

confirmed by experience; long life being most frequently to be found among the laborious part of mankind. Accordingly it is observable, that they who decline business, do nevertheless follow it, as it were, under disguise. They sometimes labour, and take as much pains in the pursuit of diversions as others do about the most weighty employments. And was not health supported by this expedient, every man would be forced to submit to business, or he must cut short the thread of his life. In short, idleness may be looked upon as a dead weight upon a man's constitution. It fills him full of infirmities, and naturally tends to shorten his days. As if Nature had intended, that he who was resolved to do but little good in the world, should not stay long in it, but should be cut off as an unprofitable member, and a nuisance to society. From what has been said it appears, that we may properly enough say of industry, what the wise man says of wisdom, *length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand, riches and honour.*

We may consider, in the next place, the pleasure and satisfaction which redound from the pursuit of any honest employment. As to which it must be granted, that men's inclinations do not always lead them to business; but then it is because they are depraved. A wicked man thinks virtue unpleasant: so likewise a vitiated palate can relish nothing that is wholesome. In like manner, where idleness has got possession, business becomes a grievance. But still in itself it is valuable in this respect. Custom indeed bears a great sway in this, as in all other cases. Those who have inured themselves to business and employment, do very often like it so well, that they know not how to live without it. It must undoubtedly therefore be pleasant to them. Perhaps it is gain which greatly contributes to make it so. Let what will make it so, if the motive be honest, no objection can be drawn from thence. Lawful gain may certainly be lawfully followed. But doubtless a man may take a pleasure in being industrious, and minding his business, upon further views than barely the love of gain. His very employment may be pleasing and delightful to him, taken abstractedly from other considerations. However, he may find great satisfaction in industry, as it is a part of his duty, as it is pleasing and

and acceptable in the fight of God, as it enables him to do good in his generation, and more particularly to *provide for his own household*, which whosoever neglects, is, as the Apostle declares, *worse than an infidel*. Not to mention his having an eye upon those spiritual advantages, which I have not yet considered. So that a man may take pleasure in business, both upon his own account, and for the sake of those many advantages which attend it. If it be said, that hard labour is troublesome and painful, yet nevertheless custom will, in a great measure, render it otherwise. However, there are two things to be duly considered; the one is, that hard labour, whatever it be in itself, is much pleasanter than constant idleness. Doing nothing is certainly the hardest labour that man can undergo. It is the most restless and uneasy state imaginable. And so it may well be, because it is repugnant to the nature of man's mind, the very essence of which is action. When a man has no employment for his thoughts, they are apt to work inwards, and prey upon themselves. A slothful man's time is a greater burthen to him, than a laborious man's work. The latter knows how to dispatch the one; but the former knows not how to get rid of the other. It still hangs upon his hands, and perpetually troubles and torments him. As rest gives refreshment to a laborious man; so an idle man can find no ease till he takes up some business or employment. Which brings me to the other thing to be considered; namely, That as hard labour is better than idleness, so it mightily recommends rest to a man, and gives him a true relish of it. The slothful man is glutted and surfeited with his ease; but that leisure, which the industrious man finds in his intermissions from business, is truly delightful to him. Labour indeed and rest do mutually recommend each other; not only for the pleasure of variety, but as the succession is agreeable to nature. When a man is wearied with toil and business, his spirits are sunk, and he finds and feels he wants rest. Upon this account it is welcome when it arrives. So likewise when he is refreshed, and his strength and vigour return, his appetite for business returns along with them; and he goes to his work with the same alacrity that he came from it. This is nothing but what is natural, and for

that reason must be pleasant to all, but such as are besotted with sloth. It appears from hence, as if Providence designed men the true enjoyment of no blessings whatsoever, without the price of labour; since even rest has a natural kind of tax set upon it. Though a man may get rest, without antecedent labour, yet it is then of no value, nor will it do him any good. If he intends to enjoy it, he must take some pains before-hand. As a man must fast a convenient time, if he will have an appetite to his food; so he must employ himself some way or other, were it for nothing but to get an appetite to rest. Ease to the laborious man is as grateful as food to the hungry; but to the idle man, it is like feeding upon a full stomach.

I am now to consider industry with an eye to religion. As to which it may be observed, in the first place, that it highly promotes the glory of God. A due improvement of his gifts and talents must necessarily redound to his honour. Industry brings to light the hidden works and wonders of nature; discovers their various ends and uses, and thereby gives men a proper occasion to acknowledge God's wisdom in the creation of the world; to proclaim his power, and extol his goodness. And as industry reflects honour upon God, by giving such a lustre to the natural world, so it still more successfully answers the same end by the effect which it has upon the moral world. By industry societies are brought into order and regularity, governments are framed, and wholesome laws are enacted: and what it thus sets up, it continues firmly to support. Hereby the members of a community acquit themselves carefully in their respective trusts, and rightly execute their several functions. Now this order and œconomy among men manifestly glorifies their Maker, who is a God of order, and not of confusion. The wisdom and perfection of the Creator clearly shines through the conduct and management of his creatures.

Industry is a great friend to religion, in that it not only makes men useful members of a commonwealth, but enables them to do much good in a private capacity, to their neighbours, friends, and relations. It puts it into their power to exercise acts of charity, relieve the needy,

needy, and succour those in distress. Thus when the Apostle enjoins labour, and requires men to *work with their hands the thing which is good*, one end which he has in view is, *that they may have to give to him that needeth*. But the greatest advantage of industry is, that it contributes so mightily to the preservation of innocence, by securing men from the ill effects of sloth. Idleness is the great inlet to licentiousness, and tends to all manner of vice and immorality. It corrupts the principles of religion, and opens a door to all kinds of sin and wickedness. There is but a short step from doing nothing, to doing mischief. The mind of man will not sleep; but his thoughts and his passions will drive at something. He is prone to evil, and will naturally run into it, if due employments be wanting to correct the bias. When men have nothing to do, they soon grow sick of their own company. The entertainments of learning, of nature, of reason, are not agreeable to the bulk of mankind, who have neither capacity nor relish for things of this kind. Idleness therefore gives full scope to all sorts of temptations, against which the mind is utterly unguarded. It draws men into ill company, and exposes them to the infection of all those vices, which are there to be met with. In a word, men hereby lie open to all the sollicitations of sin, and the prevailing influence of ill examples. And though idleness be thus a sufficient tempter of itself, yet it also exposes them, in a particular manner, to the temptations of their spiritual adversary. This is his grand opportunity, and no doubt he will strike in with it, to facilitate men's ruin, and hasten their destruction.

It were well if the ill effects of idleness terminated in those who were guilty of it, and reached no further. But as it dishonours God, and is in every respect pernicious to a man's self, so it has a great tendency to make him transgress against his neighbour. And thus it becomes, in a new respect, prejudicial to the public. As an idle person is peculiarly liable to the contagion of other men's vices, so others are in danger of being affected by his idleness. It is his custom to put a stop where he can to other men's business, as well as his own; as well to keep himself in countenance, as

to encourage his beloved sloth. It is natural for such persons to endeavour to get companions as idle as themselves, and consequently if they do not find them, to make them such; this perhaps being the only instance of their taking pains. Thus other men are brought into a snare, and oftentimes ruined by these means. And thus likewise business is interrupted, to the detriment of the public.

But, further: Idleness, as was observed before, reduces men to want, and tends directly to poverty. If a man be low in the world, it will keep him so; and if he enjoy a fair fortune, idleness will find means to sink it: and when he is brought to this pass, he must necessarily either work, or do worse: it is not likely that he will even then take up with working, as having been accustomed to idleness. And thus he naturally falls to stealing, as the likeliest method to supply his wants, in an easy and cheap way. Hereby he thinks he can gratify his sloth, and at the same time reap the fruits of other men's labour. Thus we see idleness brings men into the most enormous crimes. And here again, likewise, the public suffers greatly by it. Could nothing more be said for industry, than that it tends to keep men just and honest, even this would surely be a character sufficient to recommend it. Could nothing more be said against idleness, than that it tends to theft, and all kinds of wrong and injustice, even this might well be thought enough to make men dread and detest it.

Lastly: Idleness tends to disturb the peace of society. Intermeddling in other men's concerns, generally ends in difference and disagreement. It kindles contentions, and creates feuds and animosities. Now idleness is frequently at the bottom of this mischief. What contributes so much to make men meddle with the affairs of others, as neglecting their own? Did they mind their own business, they would have little leisure or inclination to intrude into other men's: and the more diligent they were at home, the less curious or busy they would be abroad. *We hear*, says the Apostle, to the Thessalonians, *that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busy bodies*; thereby plainly signifying the latter to be the effect of the former.

former. *Now them*, continues he, *that are such, we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.* And it is certain, that industry is an excellent expedient for the maintenance of peace, and the preservation of love and unity. A diligent attendance upon men's callings and employments cuts off many opportunities of dissensions, and prevents those differences and ruptures, which are the natural consequences of idleness and sloth.

Thus we see how highly advantageous industry is to religion, by promoting many branches of men's duty; by securing their innocence in general, and keeping them out of many temptations, mischiefs, and snares, which they will otherwise unavoidably fall into. It is not indeed an absolute security. A man may take ill measures, and follow bad courses, in an industrious way; but industry is not to be blamed for that. Besides, if an industrious man may, an idle man must, go astray. There is this mighty difference between them, that whereas the one may be guilty, the other cannot be innocent.

To conclude: It behoves, however, the industrious to take care, that while they apply themselves so diligently to the affairs of this world, they by no means neglect the more weighty concerns of the next: that they suffer not worldly business to engross their thoughts and endeavours, lest, while they are thus carefully employed about *things temporal*, they *finally lose the things that are eternal.*

S E R M O N IX.

Of Censoriousness.

MATTHEW, vii. 1.

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

THE general precepts and prohibitions of Scripture are usually expressed in such a latitude, that if we were always to understand them in a strict sense, and to take that meaning which lies uppermost, we should frequently pervert the laws of God, and turn our duty upside down. Particularly in respect of the prohibition in my text; to understand it absolutely, and without proper exceptions and limit-

ations, would be taking it in such a sense, as is neither consistent with the nature and reason of things, nor the very being of human society. It could not possibly be intended to have any relation to the judicial proceedings of magistrates, whose office it is to sit in judgment, to condemn and punish evil-doers; nor could it be designed as a bar to the just admonitions and reproofs of any lawful superiors. Even among equals, and private persons, it could not extend to all kinds of judgment. There are some cases and characters which ought to be, and indeed must be, unavoidably judged, and universally condemned, as far as they are known. And in such as are less notorious, it may be proper, in some circumstances, that they should neither be overlooked, nor passed over in silence. But the practice forbidden in my text is of a very different kind from any of these, or the like exceptions. Namely, when private persons judge one another, either in thought, or in word, secretly or openly, without reason, without grounds, without evidence, or perhaps against it; when they judge their brethren rashly, unadvisedly, partially, unjustly, uncharitably, or contemptuously; when they pass their judgments and censures in the dark, and shoot out their arrows at random; when they run into invectives giddily and blindly, and pronounce sentence, not according to the merits of the cause, but according to some humour, fancy, prejudice, or passion; when they charge men with faults, which they never really committed, or magnify what they have; when they aggravate every small blemish, and spread a little blot over a whole character; when they are ready to behold and blame the least *motes* in the eyes of others, and at the same time overlook *beams* in their own; when, in dubious cases, instead of putting the fairest constructions on men's actions, they pick out the worst, in opposition to all the rules both of charity and equity; when they not only take cognizance of overt-acts, but pretend to judge of men's secret thoughts, designs, purposes, and affections; in fine, when *sitting in the seat of the scornful*, they raise injurious imputations, and, either maliciously or wantonly, dictate scandal, and propagate reproach: these, and all such like practices, are, without question, prohibited in my text;

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as appears not only from the reason of the thing, but the whole tenor of Scripture. Whatever judging, whatever censuring, is contrary to truth and justice, humanity and charity, civility and good manners, is all here meant and implied, and elsewhere expressly forbidden. The generality of Christians seem either not to know this, or not to regard it. For how otherwise could they so notoriously transgress this branch of their duty? How prone are they, upon the slightest occasions, to judge rigorously, and to think and speak hardly, of one another? Though they profess a religion that breathes nothing but peace and love, and the very essence of which is charity, yet a spirit of disaffection, censoriousness, and slander, too often finds a way into their minds, corrupts their tempers, and diffuses a secret venom through their whole behaviour. How frequently do they sit in judgment on one another's characters, traducing and vilifying whom they please, and when they think fit? as if ill words and hard speeches, passed for nothing; and no account was to be given of them! Little courts of inquisition are set up, and a kind of tribunal erected in most companies, where men's conduct is examined, their actions are canvassed, and sentence is passed, according to the humours and inclinations of these officious inquisitors. Is there any subject of conversation more common, or more fashionable, than the faults and follies of mankind? A copious subject, God knows, if all of us had not work enough at home, in rectifying and reforming what is amiss in ourselves. Do we really and sincerely desire a public reformation? the likeliest way in the world to succeed, is for every man to undertake himself. To neglect our own case, and at the same time make ourselves very busy with other people's, is certainly beginning at the wrong end, and can produce nothing but mischief. In order to bring us off from this way of thinking and acting, I shall briefly endeavour these two things:

First, To point out the principal causes and occasions of such a censorious disposition. And,

Secondly, To shew the great evil and malignity of it.

First, I am to point out the principal causes and occasions of this censorious disposition. And what other causes can

we ascribe it to, than pride and vanity, ill-will and envy, indolence and idleness? These are, doubtless, the chief. It is frequently owing to the pride of our hearts, and an immoderate degree of self-love, that we are so prone to judge and censure our brethren. Whenever we set too high a value on ourselves, we are always under a temptation of disparaging others. And the higher we stand in our own esteem, the greater will be the temptation, and the more apt we shall be to look about us with contempt. If our vanity make us very solicitous to distinguish ourselves, and we find, as it often happens, that we cannot rise in a regular way, cannot advance above the common level; then the only expedient left, for distance and distinction, is to depress our neighbours. It may be in our power to debase them, though we be not able to exalt ourselves. And hence we are naturally tempted to make use of the vile methods before mentioned: to cast a blemish on other men's names, and sully their characters, in order to make our own appear the fairer upon a comparison. To which may be added, that pride and self-conceit make us apt to look upon those things as faults and misdemeanours, which are really none at all. If other men pay not the same deference to our understandings that we do ourselves; if they presume to differ from us in opinion, and refuse to think, speak, and act, just as we would have them; they will be in danger of incurring our displeasure, and provoking our censures. Our vanity cannot bear contradiction, and therefore we make a crime of it, and treat it accordingly. Hence much opprobrious language, and many injurious reflections; and we are therefore petulant, censorious, and abusive, because we are vain, arrogant, and proud. In short, from this corrupt fountain flows a great share of those bitter waters, which infect all societies, and poison human life. But,

Secondly, Another cause of censoriousness, and that a very fruitful one, is hatred and ill-will; which generally exerts itself in uncharitable thoughts, and groundless censures. It frequently gives such a bent to the mind, and such a bias to the judgment, that scarce any evidence is sufficient to counterpoise it. Dislike and disaffection are extremely apt to corrupt and pervert men's faculties. They some-

sometimes blind their eyes, and sometimes make them see double. Hence it comes to pass, that while many things good and praise-worthy are utterly over-looked, the least blemish is fastened on, and magnified beyond all measure and proportion. So great are the partialities and prepossessions of ill-will, that it shall neither suffer men to think reasonably, nor speak honestly. Their sentiments are infected, and their language tainted. While hatred is fermenting and festering in their hearts, *the poison of asps is under their lips*. Such is the nature of this perverse passion, that it blots the fairest characters, and blackens every thing it touches: turns honour into ignominy, merit into mischief, and virtue into vice. And when it happens to be accompanied with envy, it is still more turbulent and outrageous. Envy heightens and enflames it where it is, and produces it where it is not; gives it greater force, and a keener edge; and both together make men eager, and restless, and furious, in their persecutions. The envious man not only grudges the prosperity of his neighbour, but is oftentimes exceedingly mortified and afflicted at the sight of it. Being out of patience at his success and advancement in the world, he wickedly wishes, and too often endeavours, to bring him down again. If this be out of his power, and he cannot accomplish his design any other way, he attacks his good name, and strikes at his reputation. Hence a train of insinuations, suggestions, censures, calumnies: hence various arts of secret detraction, or open defamation. In short, great pains are taken, and all endeavours used, to gratify an infamous passion, at the expence very often of truth, charity, probity, and justice. But,

Thirdly, A habit of censoriousness is sometimes derived from milder and more innocent causes: it may be, and sometimes is, occasioned by superfluity of leisure, and want of better employment. When men's time hangs upon their hands, their thoughts and tongues are apt to run adrift, and to wander from object to object, from subject to subject, just as it happens. And thus without pride, without malice, without envy, they fall into this practice, not innocently indeed, but insensibly; it may be through mere wantonness, and for amusement; perhaps to keep up conversation, and as

a help to discourse. Hereby they are drawn into rash judgments, censures, and reflections, which are carelessly thrown about them, as the fool is represented in Scripture, tossing firebrands merely for sport: as if idleness could give any man a privilege to be injurious! or impertinence atone for calumny and scandal! But, in fact and reality, it often happens, though a seeming contradiction, that want of business makes men busy-bodies; and they rail and revile, because they have nothing else to do. From this brief survey of the causes and occasions of rash judging and censuring, we may evidently perceive, that it always springs from a mean and ignoble original, and very often from such a one as is altogether base and detestable. But the odious nature of this practice will more fully appear, if we proceed, as was proposed, in the

Second place, to consider the great evil and malignity of it, which will appear in several respects. For it implies great presumption and impiety towards God, great injustice towards men, and great folly in respect of ourselves. First, It is an invasion of God's prerogative. In such cases as we have been considering, no man has any right, any authority, to judge his brethren. The Apostle speaks of it with a kind of surprise and indignation: *Who art thou, says he, that judgest another's servant? To his own master he standeth, or falleth*. Whatever judicial powers may be delegated to magistrates, and other superiors, yet how does it appear, that private Christians are ordinarily possessed of any such right? Where do we read, that either judgment or vengeance belongeth unto them? By what authority do they sit as judges over one another? and not only so, but turn accusers, and even executioners? not indeed in respect of men's lives, but what is sometimes equally dear, their reputations. These are commonly used and dealt with at pleasure; though, in truth and reality, they have no more to do with the one, than they have with the other. But, further, this practice implies a kind of impious pretension to one of the divine attributes. Most certain it is, that we pass judgment in many cases, and on many occasions, when we cannot possibly have any ground to go upon, or know any thing at all of the matter; unless we

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can see into men's hearts, and *understand their thoughts afar off*. The goodness or badness of many actions depends on such circumstances, as can only be known to God, and a man's own conscience. As then we have no right to judge; so, in many cases, neither have we ability: nor can we pretend to it, without the highest arrogance and presumption. Again; considering the goodness of God, and his gracious treatment of us all, how impious and ungrateful must it be to proceed against our fellow-creatures by quite contrary rules? Have we not all the reason in the world to follow, as far as we can, this divine example? and are we not obliged in gratitude to observe it in the case before us? Has he ever exercised towards us so much patience, gentleness, kindness, and long-suffering; and shall we deal hardly, severely, unrighteously, and cruelly with his subjects and servants; who wear his image, and belong to his family? How unsuitable and ungrateful a return is this to the goodness of God? and what an indignity to our common patron and benefactor? But,

Secondly, This practice offers great injury and injustice to men. This will appear by considering the damage that is done by it, and the unrighteous and dishonourable method of doing it. Concerning the former, I shall only need to observe, that to rob men of their good names, is to deprive them of a possession which is, and must be, highly valued by them. This is made natural and necessary by the original principles of our minds. To which must be added, that, in respect of a considerable part of mankind, prosperity and success in the world depends upon reputation. To blemish their character is to blast their credit; and both together amount to a damage of the deepest nature. And what greatly heightens the injury, is that, in a great measure, it is often irreparable. The wounds which are made in men's reputation are rarely and difficultly healed; and when they are, yet they generally leave scars behind them. But to proceed: This practice is not only injurious in its consequences, but every way unjust in itself. Censorious persons, as I before took notice, often judge in the dark; often censure what they understand nothing of; often condemn both men and things, merely from a vain, or wanton,

or perverse humour, without any grounds or evidence at all. Sometimes they rashly charge men with things that were never done; at other times find fault with such actions as are perfectly innocent, and perhaps commendable. If any thing done have but a suspicious appearance, a dubious outside, or a disagreeable circumstance; this is commonly enough for their purpose; they seldom look any deeper, or inquire any further. What the agents aim or intention might be, that they rarely either know, consider, or care. And when they do happen to hit upon such points, as are both really facts, and really faults, they are so far from making fair and favourable allowances, that they frequently magnify and misrepresent; swelling the account, encreasing the blame, and aggravating the charge, beyond all bounds of sobriety and truth. In short, without regarding either evidence or equity, their usual practice is to judge at large, to reflect at random, and condemn at a venture. The notorious injustice of such proceedings needs no proof. They shew themselves sufficiently in their own naked colours. However, it may be proper to add, that if they, who are addicted to such a practice, cannot, or will not, see the iniquity of it; yet they can feel it, when it comes home upon themselves. Whenever false or groundless reflections are thrown upon them, they are sure to complain in their turn, and as loudly as any. Might not then their own consciences put them in mind, that they ought not to do to others what they cannot endure should be done to themselves? If this be not reasonable, it is impossible to say what is. But further; another circumstance that renders this practice still more base and dishonourable, is, that such censures are usually thrown out behind men's backs; and vented only for the most part in close communications, and private scandal: and that, in direct opposition to the law of God, which denounces a curse against him *who smiteth his neighbour secretly*. And without question the case is the same, whether he be thus smitten in his person or his property: I say, his property, because every man's good name is his undoubted property, till it be fairly forfeited. But, to return; this circumstance cannot but be a great aggravation of the crime we are speaking of. Thus attack-

ing men at a distance, and behind their backs, is like assaulting children and cripples, who are utterly incapable of defending themselves. For what defence can the absent make, who know nothing at all of the charge that is brought against them? They are tried, and sentenced, without being heard, or suffered to speak one word in their own vindication. Open calumny, though a great injury, is however more generous than secret slander. The one may be compared to robbing on the highway; the other to night-thefts, and plunders in the dark. In fine, such a practice is not only doing great wrong; but it is doing it in the meanest, vilest, and most odious manner.

Thirdly, and lastly: As it is great impiety towards God, and injustice towards men; so we may further observe, that it is great folly in respect of ourselves. This might be shewn at large by a great variety of arguments and considerations. But, at present, I shall confine myself to that which is specified in my text; where the ill effect, and mischievous consequence, of this vice are plainly pointed at: *Judge not, that ye be not judged.* For we are expressly assured, that *with what measure we mete, it shall be measured to us again.* If it be asked by whom; the answer is, both by God and man; though in different senses and respects. Whoever is forward in censuring; and finding fault with other men, may naturally expect to be treated by them accordingly. No man can pretend to keep a clear character himself, who makes it his business to blemish his neighbour's. That scandal which he deals in, those hard reflections which he throws about him, will be sure to recoil sooner or later, and fall back upon his own head. In a word, an ill name is in fact, and ever will be, the fate of the censorious. Nor, in the nature of the thing, can it well be otherwise. But, in truth, this is only a small matter, in comparison of what follows. Rash judging, and hard censures, not only expose men to the resentment of their fellow-creatures, but render them obnoxious to the just judgment of God himself; who has frequently declared himself the avenger of all such unrighteous practices. Not that he will judge them unjustly, because they have judged others so; but that he will treat men ri-

gorously or gently, severely or mercifully, according to the manner in which they have treated their fellow-creatures. The great Governor of the world will not fail to judge it in truth and righteousness, let men's judgments be ever so unrighteous, or their provocations ever so great. But for that very reason, and on that very account, he may, and will, have regard to the foregoing rule, the equity of which is universally perceived and acknowledged. And great pity it is, that it is not more and better considered. It would surely give a check to those licentious thoughts, and uncharitable speeches, which so much abound. Do not all men stand in great need of favour and compassion at the hands of God? How comes it then to pass, that they harden their hearts against each other, and will give no quarter? If God *should be extreme to mark what is done amiss*, what would become of the best of us? What mortal could stand such a test, or abide such a trial? And yet in one another we not only mark, strictly and severely mark, what is amiss; but oftentimes blame what is not amiss, and condemn the most innocent actions. The Scripture declares, that *he shall have judgment without mercy, who hath shewed no mercy.* What then must they expect, who judge and censure their brethren after such a manner, as neither to shew mercy, nor even justice? What folly, what madness, must it be, merely for the gratifying of a froward humour, to forfeit the favour of God, and oblige him to *shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure*?—Upon the whole, if we desire to be favourably judged, we must take heed how we judge. We are apt to imagine, that no great stress will be laid on such transient things as words. But we may easily discover, that this is a mere delusion. All sin is conceived in the heart; and whether it appear in words, or in deeds, or neither, we are equally guilty in the sight of God. Whoever therefore *bridleth not his tongue*, and even curbeth not his thoughts, *that man's religion is vain.* To conclude: If we *desire life*, and that divine favour which is better than life, it behoves us to *keep our hearts with all diligence.* This will enable us to observe with ease that direction of the Psalmist: *Keep thy tongue from evil; and thy lips, that they speak no guile.*

S E R M O N X.

On the Excellence and Immortality
of the Human Soul.

ECCLES. xii. part of the 7th verse.

And the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

THIS chapter begins with an exhortation to youth, to season their minds with an early sense of God and their duty; that it may direct them in all their ways, and be a support and comfort to them in the declension of life. The wise preacher shews the folly of deferring the thoughts of religion, and the improvement of men's minds, to their latter days. He is so far from looking upon old age as a proper season for the accomplishment of this great work, that he represents it as scarce able to bear its own weight: and then describes, in a noble allegory, its various infirmities and gradual decays, till it terminate in death and dissolution. Next he pursues the soul and body after their separation, points out the fate and lot of both, and traces them to their respective originals. *The dust, says he, shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.* That is, the body shall dissolve into that earth of which it was first composed, and be incorporated with it; but the soul, being of a higher and nobler nature, will survive the separation, and return into the hands of its Creator, to give an account of itself, and be by him treated and dealt with according to the condition and circumstances in which he shall find it. My text is therefore a plain and positive declaration of a future state; and, by probable consequence, of the perpetuity of that state; which are therefore to be the subjects of the following discourse. And what can be more worthy of our inquiry and concern? Of all questions that can possibly come under our consideration, the most important is, Whether there be not another life after this? Whether we are to die like brute beasts that have no understanding, or to live again in a future state, and exist for ever? These are points of such vast moment, such infinite consequence, that they necessarily demand every man's most serious attention. In other pursuits we may be en-

gaged by a principle of curiosity, or the love of truth, or perhaps some particular interest: but on the resolution of these points depends our all; for so indeed it is upon the comparison. If death make an utter end of us, and we have no prospect beyond it, this life may be looked upon as a mere shadow, or a dream not worth regarding. But perhaps it will be asked, what occasion there is to examine a question that we find already determined to our hands: for does not revelation assure us of a future state? and are not *life and immortality fully brought to light in the gospel?* This is very true; but still the proofs and evidences of natural reason deserve to be considered; partly to arm our minds against the objections of unbelievers, and enable us to promote their conviction; and partly for the support and confirmation of our own faith. And indeed it cannot but give satisfaction to every rational Christian, to find that the doctrines of that revelation which he has embraced, are perfectly agreeable to the natures of things, and the reason of his own mind. Let us then briefly consider the great doctrine of a future state in this light, and see what indications, what evidence, we can discover by it. In order thereto, it will be requisite to consider—the nature of a human soul—the present condition and circumstances of mankind—and the moral perfections of our Maker. I begin with inquiring into the nature and frame of a human soul; concerning which let it be observed, in the

First place, that it plainly appears to be a simple, un compounded, indivisible substance. All matter is evidently composition; every part or parcel of it being an endless combination or heap of substances; and, by consequence, necessarily liable to dissolution and corruption: for the particles whereof it consists are always unavoidably subject to disunion and separation; and accordingly hence it comes to pass, that every system of matter is broken up in time, and sooner or later moulders away. But that the soul is not thus compounded, is manifest from all its perceptions, and all its operations as might be shewn at large, were not such arguments too abstracted for the present occasion. The soul then being an un compounded, single substance, can admit of no division or dissolution; and from hence it clearly follows, that it

and must be incorruptible. But how incorruptible? May not God annihilate it whenever he pleases? Doubtless he may: and the same may be said of the whole creation. Whether it be probable that he will do so, is to be inquired and considered afterwards. In the mean time, we may safely conclude from the foregoing consideration, that the soul is not capable of being destroyed by second causes; which is all that the present argument pretends to prove. But,

Secondly, Another argument, drawn from the nature of the soul, is the excellence of those powers and faculties which God has given it. But having particularly considered this point in the foregoing discourse, it will be needless to re-lame it here, nor shall I repeat. It may be sufficient to point out, in a few words, where the force of the argument lies. Since God has endued us with intellectual and moral capacities; those great and sublime powers, which dignify our nature, and render us partakers of the divine image; it can never be supposed, with the least colour of probability, that he should confine us to the short span of this present life; and intend us, in a few years, to perish for ever. Since the soul of man is so highly exalted, and so nobly framed and furnished, it must, in all likelihood, be designed for a very different duration, as well as a more perfect state. Especially if we consider,

Thirdly, That we neither do nor can arrive in this life at that perfection, and maturity, of which our natures are manifestly capable. All the creatures beneath us seem to attain their full perfection in their present state; I mean, to rise to the height of their respective capacities. But this appears far from being the case of human souls. Even those men that have the largest abilities, and fairest opportunities, and make the best use of them, neither do nor can accomplish their minds to the extent of their faculties. They can neither obtain that measure of knowledge, nor those degrees of virtue, nor that portion of happiness, whereof they are capable. Part of human life is spent before the first dawns of reason; and a great part of it passed before we reach any ripeness of understanding. To which may be added, the disadvantages and decays that commonly attend men in the last stage of life. And how short,

how scanty, is the intermediate term for the culture of our minds, and the improvement of our faculties? Yet short as it is, a great part of it is unavoidably taken up in providing for the occasions of our bodies, and answering the demands of sense. Are we then so framed, as barely to be allowed just to taste the sweets of knowledge, and the satisfactions of truth? Are these desirable objects set before our eyes to engage our affections, and excite our longings; and as soon almost as we understand the worth of them, to be snatched away from us for ever? Was the soul formed with such large capacities, for such small improvements, and so inconsiderable a duration? Was it fitted for a perpetual progress, and an endless growth; and yet designed to be cut off, as it were, in its infancy, and perish almost at its first setting out? For, in truth, the understandings of men in this life, appear only to be in their infant state; as being doubtless capable of exceeding their present attainments, as much as the knowledge of grown men exceeds that of children. Again: The measure of man's virtues and moral graces is no less imperfect and defective, supposing him as careful and diligent about them as he ought to be; yet even on this supposition he could be no very great proficient. Considering the patterns that men have to copy after, and the perfections they have to imitate, a whole eternity may seem requisite for accomplishing their minds, and completing their improvements: or, to speak more properly, they can never be completed; because they will ever be capable of further degrees, and higher advancement. Besides, we contract in our first years such an attachment to our senses and appetites, and such a fondness for their respective objects, that the remainder of our lives is seldom sufficient to disengage ourselves, and recover a right bias; much less for arriving at a state of perfection. In short, we have so many indispositions to remove, so many disorders to rectify, so many evil habits to shake off, and so many good ones to introduce and establish; that the best men can only be considered as beginners and probationers in virtue: so far are they from being able to perfect their natures. Can it then be supposed, that God should have ordained us only to make an entrance into the paths of wisdom

dom and virtue, or, at the utmost, a very short and precarious progress, and then totally disappear, and drop into oblivion! When we have just found our feet, and learned to guide our steps, must we then be struck down, to rise no more! Can these be the fruits of our moral endeavours, and religious improvements? No man can possibly believe it, till he have quite forgotten who it is that governs the world; as will further appear afterwards. And since man's virtue is thus imperfect in this life, his happiness must needs be so too: for as to outward goods, they are little more than shadows of true bliss. The enjoyments of this world are empty, and unsatisfactory, as well as uncertain; and the whole train of our pursuits is, in reality, a succession of disappointments. Such objects are not big enough to answer our faculties. *The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing*; and much less is the mind in possession of its wishes. Since then we cannot find true and solid satisfaction in this state; since we *walk in a vain show, and disquiet ourselves in vain*; we may hence derive just hopes of better success in another. If God created us in order to partake of the overflowings of his felicity, that end neither is, nor ever can be, effectually answered here; where little more is allowed us than a bare glimpse of happiness, and that at a distance. And who can imagine, after we have acted, or endeavoured to act, a short part in the theatre of the world, that the great business of life should then be finished, and the scene shuts up for ever?

Fourthly: Another indication appearing in the nature and frame of our minds, is that earnest desire of immortality, which so uniformly and universally prevails. A future state, and that a perpetual one, is the object of every man's wish; his only excepted, who is so obstinately and desperately guilty, as to dread the vengeance of Heaven; and upon that account, and that only, wishes himself out of being. And even in this case, the desire of existence is far from being extinguished. It still operates, however over-ruled by the terrors of his prospect. But to proceed: I am not supposing that the desire here spoken of was, like many others, actually planted in our minds by the Author of nature, a supposition as needless, as it seems to be groundless;

for the love of natural good being necessary and unavoidable, in order to obtain that good, the desire of existence must consequently be so too. I mean, that it must take place, whenever there is happiness in expectation: for in this case, the desire of existence necessarily results from the frame and constitution of nature. How then, or which way, does it amount to an argument of a future state? Had the Creator implanted this desire in our minds, it might readily have been concluded that he would not fail to gratify it; but how can such a consequence be drawn from a desire confessedly necessary? I answer, that it is as full and forcible a proof in this case, as in the other: for to frame our minds, and fix the nature and constitution of things, in such a manner, as must necessarily produce this desire, is, in effect, the same thing as if he had actually and directly formed the desire itself. And therefore it is not to be supposed, in either case, that he should subject us to inevitable delusion and disappointment. Had he intended us nothing beyond this life, he would never have drawn us irresistibly into such false hopes, and fallacious desires. Besides; were the necessity of this desire to be considered as absolute, and every way independent of the divine will, still the argument would hold good: for whatever is absolutely necessary, must be just and right in itself; and, by consequence, an object of God's approbation. But,

Fifthly, That the soul of man will survive this present life, may be further argued from the strength of those benevolent affections which God has planted in it, affections that knit mankind together, and produce all the sacred ties of affinity, consanguinity, and friendship. These affections improved and heightened in virtuous characters, by a continual exchange of good offices, by real worth, mutual complacency, and reciprocal esteem, form that union of minds, that sacred tie of friendship, which adorns and dignifies our species, and contributes so highly to the honour and the happiness of human life. The root of it lies deep in our nature, and the strongest principles within us concur to lead us into it. What mean then such propensions and dispositions? And whence comes it to pass, that we are so many ways prompted to strengthen them?

these bands, and draw them as close as possible? If this present state, where our days are only as an *hand-breadth*, and our life *vanisheth as a vapour*, be the whole of our existence, it must seem extremely hard to account for the principles and provisions we are speaking of. Can men be required by the impulses of nature, and the precepts of virtue, to form such close and cordial confederacies; to build up the fairest and firmest friendships, whose foundations are in the dust? When death divides the nearest relations, and the dearest friends, what is it that renders such a separation tolerable, and administers real support and consolation? Is it not the expectation of meeting again in another and a better world? But if this life was our all, and death our utter destruction, how dreadful, how insupportable would it be? How would it rack men's hearts to see before their eyes a total dissolution both of friend and friendship; and to find themselves just parting, never to meet more? Had therefore our Maker designed us for this life only, he would, in all probability, have given us cooler affections, and weaker attachments; and thereby have prevented the terrible anxieties above-mentioned. And indeed such strong ligaments can never be fit for creatures of so short a duration. Again: We find in our minds a powerful principle of gratitude towards benefactors; more especially our Supreme, the author and giver of all good. Him we are bound, by all the ties of nature, and reason, and religion, to reverence and *love with all our hearts, and with all our souls*. We are every way excited, by a due contemplation of his infinite perfections, to frame the most amiable ideas of him, and to work up our minds to the highest pitch of esteem and veneration: to consider the greatness of his power, the excellence of his majesty, the depth of his wisdom, and the glory of his goodness; how many and various his benefits, how diffusive and constant his bounty; till our thoughts are filled, and our hearts enflamed, with the lustre, and beauty, and grandeur, of the object; and all our faculties conspire to engage and fix us in the admiration of it. And to what end these mighty obligations and powerful attractions? Why must we exert our faculties, and raise our affections, to the highest pitch, in meditating on the Supreme Being, and admiring and

adoring his boundless perfections, if, after a very imperfect acquaintance, all our hopes are at an end, and the holy flame is soon to expire, and be extinguished for ever? Could so great and important a preparation be required for any purposes of this short state? Or would our bountiful Creator bring us into being, fit us for a participation of the sovereign good, and when we had just begun to taste it, snatch us away, and reduce us to our original nothing? Had he intended us for this life only, he would rather have concealed from us, as much as possible, this glorious object, than set it before us, and draw us to it, to so very little purpose. We may safely, therefore, conclude, that such natural propensions and tendencies plainly point out another state, and can never end in frustration and disappointment. Were it otherwise, an acquaintance with God would be so far from yielding us peace and comfort, that it would afflict us beyond measure, and drive us into utter despair.

Sixthly, and lastly, Another proof, and that a very obvious one, arises from the suggestions of conscience; which is continually foreboding a future state, and urging it powerfully on the minds of men. It speaks so clearly and constantly in behalf thereof, and is so plain and peremptory in its declarations, that its testimony ought not to be rejected; and indeed cannot, without great violence done to the frame and constitution of our own minds. The soul of man is not only apt to smart under a sense of guilt, but is also liable to secret misgivings, and painful apprehensions of what is to follow. When a man has notoriously violated the laws of Heaven, or the dictates of right reason, his conscience not only rebukes him for it, but is frequently spreading before his eyes the terrors of futurity, and the sad apprehensions of a miserable doom. On the other hand, when a man has maintained his innocence, and held fast his integrity; when he has carefully discharged his duty, and lived up to the dignity of his nature; his conscience not only applauds him for it, but cheers his heart with assurances of a future recompense, and pleasing expectations of a happy hereafter. Now, if there be no real foundation for these things; if this man's hopes, and the other man's fears, are altogether groundless and chimerical;

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Sixthly, and lastly, Another proof, and that a very obvious one, arises from the suggestions of conscience; which is continually foreboding a future state, and urging it powerfully on the minds of men. It speaks so clearly and constantly in behalf thereof, and is so plain and peremptory in its declarations, that its testimony ought not to be rejected; and indeed cannot, without great violence done to the frame and constitution of our own minds. The soul of man is not only apt to smart under a sense of guilt, but is also liable to secret misgivings, and painful apprehensions of what is to follow. When a man has notoriously violated the laws of Heaven, or the dictates of right reason, his conscience not only rebukes him for it, but is frequently spreading before his eyes the terrors of futurity, and the sad apprehensions of a miserable doom. On the other hand, when a man has maintained his innocence, and held fast his integrity; when he has carefully discharged his duty, and lived up to the dignity of his nature; his conscience not only applauds him for it, but cheers his heart with assurances of a future recompense, and pleasing expectations of a happy hereafter. Now, if there be no real foundation for these things; if this man's hopes, and the other man's fears, are altogether groundless and chimerical; what

what account is to be given of either? How came they to spread so wide, and be so deeply rooted in human nature? This argument seems equally conclusive, whether we mean by conscience merely the operation of our intellectual faculty, or an instinctive principle superadded thereto: for, upon either supposition, we are manifestly so framed, as naturally and unavoidably to fall into such a persuasion, and fix in it. Nay, when sin and wickedness have made it men's interest to shake it off, and to wish and strive against it as much as possible, they can seldom or never accomplish it. The expectation of a future state sticks fast in their minds; haunting and terrifying them, in spite of all their arts and endeavours to the contrary. Whatever means may be used, conscience is never to be quite silenced; and very often it speaks so loudly and awfully, as to startle the sinner, and makes him tremble in the midst of his vicious pursuits, and criminal enjoyments. What then can be the meaning of these natural anticipations? If there be nothing to come hereafter, how strangely is man amused, and how unaccountably misled? All appearances without him, and every principle within him, conspire to deceive him. If the grave was his utmost limit, why should he find himself under a necessity of looking beyond it? to what end were such clear prospects opened, and such strong expectations kindled? by what strange fate is he compelled to *walk in a vain show, and disquiet himself in vain*? But the truth is, such a supposition is destitute of all manner of foundation; as being directly repugnant both to the nature of God and man; as will further appear hereafter. Whatever conscience presages, whatever uncorrupted reason suggests, may securely be relied on, and considered as the voice of him, who can never disappoint his creatures, or falsify those expectations which he has given them. And indeed it is impiety to suppose, that Infinite Wisdom cannot govern the world without the help of fallacy and fiction,

This argument, drawn from natural conscience, will appear yet stronger, if we consider the extent and universality of it. It is not a notion or an impulse that prevails here and there; at some certain times, and some particular parts of the

world; the voice of it has been heard in all ages, and in all nations, and its convictions spread over the face of the whole earth: scarce an exception to be found even among the most uncivilized and barbarous people. There is, indeed, and has been all along, a great difference in men's ideas of a future state, according to the lights received among them, and the degrees of their improvement; but the doctrine itself, in some dress or other, has universally prevailed. Which plainly shews it to be, in the strictest sense of the word, natural; as arising from the frame and constitution of our minds, and the genuine principles of humanity. Was it not founded on nature, and perfectly agreeable to unprejudiced reason, how should it ever be so deeply rooted in the minds of men? even of the best and wisest men, in a more peculiar manner; and those too destitute of supernatural light, and the benefit of revelation. This consideration may be justly accounted a strong presumption in behalf of the doctrine before us. For certainly it would be very strange, if men's minds were so framed and turned, that even the wisest and worthiest of them should naturally run into such sentiments concerning this matter, as had no foundation in truth or nature. What should give mankind such an invincible bias to error, such an universal tendency to delusion? The more we consider these things, the more we shall be at a loss to give any account of them, but what either supposes, or must terminate in, the truth and reality of a future state.

S E R M O N XI.

The same Subject continued.

ECCLES. xii. part of the 7th verse.

And the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

IN a former discourse on these words, I proposed to consider briefly the proofs and evidences of a future state, arising from natural reason; and began with those arguments which are plainly deducible from the frame and constitution of our own minds. This head being then dispatched, what now remains to be inquired into, is the present condition and

and circumstances of mankind, considered relatively and in connexion with the known attributes and perfections of the Deity. I shall give a short account of each, as far as our subject is concerned; and, having laid down the facts, produce the argument, and point out the conclusion, which naturally flows from them.

As to the present condition and circumstances of mankind, the fact is plainly as follows: We find from daily experience, and general observation, that there is no regular distribution of good and evil in this life: in many respects, *all things come alike to all, and there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked.* Though virtue naturally tends to happiness, and vice is naturally productive of misery, yet in this world neither of these effects constantly happens: many things concurring to hinder both the one and the other. We see that good men are exposed to various hardships and misfortunes; which, on numberless occasions, they are forced to undergo. So far they oftentimes are from being happy, as might be hoped and expected, that they are deeply distressed, and greatly miserable; so far from reaping the proper fruits of their virtue, as to suffer like evil-doers, and be compassed about with a sad variety of wretchedness. Nay, it has too often happened, that their very virtue has been the occasion of their sufferings, and the accidental cause of all their calamities. On the other hand, wicked men often prosper and flourish in the midst of their iniquities; not only escaping the forementioned hardships, but abounding in all the pleasures and enjoyments of life. Nay, their very wickedness is sometimes the occasion of their prosperity; and a great part of their lives is perhaps a continued scene of successful vice and triumphant villany. All ages and countries abound in instances of both these kinds, and the observation is familiar and common among men—*So promiscuously and irregularly are good and evil dispensed here below!* And indeed this has been at all times so remarkable, that many ill-advised men have rashly taken occasion from hence to call in question either Divine Providence, or the Divine Perfections: but on very weak grounds, as will be seen afterwards.

In the mean time, however difficult it may have been to account for the providential dispensations of this life, most certain it is, that God's moral character is, and must be, perfectly clear and unspotted. He necessarily approves virtue, and disapproves vice, because the one is essentially amiable, and the other absolutely odious in its own nature. Conformably hereto, he is perpetually directed by the sacred rule of truth and moral fitness in all his proceedings, and in all his dealings with his creatures. A Being of infinite wisdom must, at all times, infallibly act according to the reasons of things, and the right of every case, because there is always a motive, a powerful motive, for so doing, arising from the intrinsic worth and excellence of such actions; and because, on the other hand, there can be no possible motive to induce God, on any occasion, to deviate from this divine rule.—Frail man indeed is very much governed by affections and passions, and those, alas! often irregular; but his Maker, being entirely void of all affection, can only be influenced by reason and rectitude; from which there is nothing to withdraw him, and to which he is therefore immoveably attached. The consequence of which is, the perfect righteousness of his government, and the inviolable equity of all dispensations.—Two other particulars relating to our subject I shall only just mention, as being universally acknowledged and understood: the one is, that God is privy to our whole conduct, and intimately acquainted with all our thoughts, words, and actions; and the other, that the lot and condition of every creature is altogether dependent on him; good and evil being lodged in his hands, and his power of dispensing them absolute and uncontrollable.—These truths being premised, I shall now endeavour to shew how we are to argue from them, in order to a clear and satisfactory proof of the great point before us: and here we shall find, that, supposing our souls to perish with our bodies, the whole scene of things here below is utterly unaccountable, and indeed directly repugnant to the moral perfection of the Deity.

If then virtue be in itself really better and more deserving than vice, it undeniably follows, that good men have a better title to favour than wicked men; their

conduct being intrinsically more amiable and meritorious. And that virtue is really thus preferable, is, to all intelligent beings, as evident as the difference between light and darkness: and if to all intelligent beings, much more to the Supreme, whose eye is perfectly pure, and his judgment unprejudiced and infallible. Virtue therefore is secure of his approbation; and, by consequence, virtuous men of his favour: for goodness in the action is desert in the agent; and desert in the agent is a title that can never possibly be rejected by an all-righteous Governor. There can be no better or stronger reason given, why God should favour one man, and discountenance another, than that the one is virtuous, and the other vicious. Nay, if our ideas may be trusted, it is the only one that can finally have any weight with so perfect a judge. Most certain therefore it is, that God will treat men accordingly; judging them according to their works, and distinguishing the righteous from the wicked in a most signal manner; conformably to moral truth, and the eternal reasons of things. This, I say, will most assuredly be done at some time or other. But it is not done in this life, as we have already observed and acknowledged; and therefore there will certainly be another. Since at present the wicked frequently prosper, and the righteous fall into distress, contrary to the deserts of the one, and the demerits of the other; it plainly follows, that there must and will be a future state, to adjust this irregularity, and rectify the disorders occasioned by it. Without question, God has wise reasons for dispensing good and evil promiscuously in this world; and some of them we know: but without a future state, he could have none at all. Nay, such a proceeding would, in that case, be directly repugnant to all the reason in the world. Was there to be no life hereafter, every man would undoubtedly be happy or unhappy here in proportion to his virtues or vices. All the events and dispensations of Providence, would turn upon this hinge, and the blessings of Heaven be distributed by this rule. But since we find it in fact very much otherwise, the doctrine before us seems as clear and certain, as that *God loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity.*

Here perhaps it may be alleged, that

the best men, notwithstanding their virtues, have transgressed more or less, and are therefore sinners in the sight of God: that upon this account they have no right to complain of their present hardships and sufferings, supposing these sufferings not to exceed the proportion of their demerits. To this I answer, that however this allegation may serve to stop the mouths, and silence the murmurs, of unhappy men, it no way affects the argument before us; which is drawn from the moral perfection of the Deity, and that rule of righteousness by which he must necessarily be supposed to proceed in all his dispensations. The best men, we are told, have failed and fallen short of their duty, and are therefore justly punishable at any time. Be it so. But have not wicked men failed and offended much more; and therefore deserved much greater punishment? Supposing then no future state, how comes it to pass, that they are not punished, constantly punished, in this world, in proportion to their demerits? If the former be just and fit, do we not plainly see that the latter is much more so? To execute sentence speedily on good men, because they have sometimes erred and done amiss, and at the same time quite overlook the crimes of notorious sinners, is impossible to be reconciled with any idea of moral truth. Whatever reason be assigned for the immediate punishment of those delinquents who are least guilty, must needs hold much stronger in respect of those who are most guilty: and therefore, excluding a life to come, no wicked man would ever have prospered in this. And the reason is, because a righteous and perfect Governor can never act arbitrarily, or capriciously; but will always follow the rule of equity, and the right of the case. It must indeed be confessed, that in very many cases, we cannot presume to judge of the grounds and reasons of the Divine conduct; but in the present case, they are so plain, and clear, and cogent, that if there be any truth in our faculties, and virtue and vice be real things, there is no room for doubt, or the least suspicion of error. God will assuredly manifest his righteousness in the most public manner, and redress the confusions of this present life.

Should it be further urged, that the sufferings of the righteous are compensated

fired by that serenity of mind, and self-satisfaction which their virtues affords them; and that therefore there is no occasion for a future state to make them amends; the answer is as follows: It is indeed readily granted, that virtue is always amiable, always beneficial, in its own nature; and would be greatly so in favourable conditions and circumstances. But in the case we are speaking of, its principal comforts vanish, and the enjoyment of it dwindles to almost nothing. Supposing a man both virtuous and prosperous, he could not be accounted happy, had he no prospect beyond the grave. Neither outward advantages, nor inward improvements, could avail him much, if he stood so near the brink of destruction, and expected so soon a total dissolution both of soul and body. But this is not the case before us; we are speaking of a good man very unhappy in this world, and deeply distressed; surrounded with griefs and calamities, and perhaps his whole life a continued scene of sorrow and tribulation. Here then the question is, whether, without a future state, his virtue be able to make him ample amends for all his sufferings; to heal the wounds of misfortune, and support him sinking under a load of adversity? Alas! this is so far from being the truth of his case, that he is almost entirely disqualified to receive any enjoyment, or any comfort from his virtue. Extremity of pain and grief will admit of no comfort but what beams from above. And if the windows of Heaven were quite shut, what could a good man, in such a condition, do more, than sit down disconsolate, and abandoned to sorrow and despair? But is not virtue, in itself, fair, and lovely, and full of charms? True; but he is not at leisure, not in a condition, to attend to them: and if he was, the more lovely he found it, the more it would grieve him to think, that he had no hopes of living to enjoy it; excepting the poor remainder of a short and precarious life. Can then a righteous God leave virtuous men thus destitute, or bring them into the world for such a purpose as this? Impossible. Such a proceeding appears quite inconsistent even with human goodness; much more with divine.

But further: It may deserve to be considered, that part of our species are cut

off before they are capable of either contracting guilt, or even knowing the difference between vice and virtue. Among these, doubtless there are some whose portion of evil exceeds their good; whose little lives are almost filled up with pain, and suffering, and lamentation. Now if these hardships are to be made up abundantly in another life, there is no difficulty at all in the case. But, supposing no future state, it seems not only difficult, but utterly impossible, to be accounted for; since, on this supposition, their very existence is a calamity, an injury, a curse. It is not conceivable, that the all-wise and all-perfect Creator should produce any beings in vain; much less, that he should produce them for such an end as is worse than none at all. I will not presume to say, that the communication of good is the sole end of the creation; but one end, one chief end, we plainly perceive it must have been: and therefore we may be assured, that no creatures can be sent into the world with a quite contrary view; neither can any be treated, without any demerit of their own, so hardly and rigorously, as to give just cause for doubting of such a conclusion. If then the foregoing case be really fact, as cannot I think be denied, or disputed, it affords, of itself, an unanswerable proof of a future state: and, if among the adult part of mankind, there are, or have been, any so innocent and good, and yet so unhappy and wretched, that their sufferings have exceeded the proportion of their demerits; the same consequence will follow, and every such instance will yield an irresistible argument for the truth of that doctrine which we have been considering. For most certain it is, that God can never ordain any man to suffer more than he has deserved, without making him full reparation either here, or hereafter.

Thus then we may safely and justly argue from the present condition and circumstances of mankind; which, without a future state, are plainly repugnant to the Divine attributes; though, with a future state, as plainly and perfectly agreeable thereto: for, admitting such a state, the unequal and irregular distributions of this life are easily solved, and readily accounted for. Nay, they become not only intelligible, but manifestly convenient, suitable, and fit; as directly conducting

conducting to prepare mankind for such a state, by a fuller exercise and improvement of every virtue. For a life to come, it may be, and is, highly fitting, that we be trained and tutored here in a state of discipline and probation. Human virtue may require, in order to its perfection and our happiness, that it be thus tried, prepared, and purified: and different minds may require different trials, and various dispensations. On which account we have no reason to wonder, when we find good men in great distress; this being perhaps no more than what is necessary to form an exalted character; to produce more illustrious virtue, and triumphant merit. To *strangers* and *pilgrims*, *seeking a better country*, and travelling to their appointed home, no difficulties or distresses on the road can seem either unnatural, or intolerable; especially, when they have the pleasure and the encouragement to know that their own final advantage will be thereby promoted. Since then our condition and circumstances here below, are no other than what might be expected, supposing a future state, this may be looked on as a further presumption of the reality of such a state. And thus our present life will be considered, what it really is, a nursery for the next; where we are to be properly educated, and carefully disciplined, for a more durable and blissful state. But, on the other hand, if we exclude futurity, and give up all our hopes and pretensions beyond the grave; this present life becomes, in the eyes of thinking men, all darkness, discomfort, and perplexity; a sad scene of desperate disorder, and inextricable confusion. This, I have shewn, can never be the case of mankind, while they are under the government of Infinite Wisdom and Goodness. Upon the whole, whether we consider the nature and condition of man, or the nature and perfections of his Maker, we find plain indications, and solid proofs, of the important doctrine now before us.

What remains to be considered is, whether or no the future state here treated of will be of perpetual duration. It does not indeed necessarily follow, that because the soul survives the body, therefore it must exist for ever. For doubtless it must always be in the Creator's power to put a period to its exist-

ence; and therefore its immortality entirely depends on his good will and pleasure: and if this will has been revealed, as God be thanked it has, it must needs be peculiarly fitting to have recourse to that revelation, as will be observed afterwards. However, at present, let us go on with the evidence of natural reason; which, even as to this point, deserves our attention. Since then God is pleased to prolong the soul's existence after death, and provide for it another state, as appears from a great variety of proofs; it follows from thence, with high degrees of probability, that he will always continue its being, and suffer it to enjoy that immortality which seems to be the privilege of its nature. The force of that argument, which we have just examined, concerning the sufferings of the innocent, and the adversities of the righteous, does not indeed extend thus far; because another life of a limited duration may undoubtedly be sufficient to compensate both. Nevertheless we have, even from reason, good grounds to hope that our next life will be unlimited and endless. I shall content myself at present with mentioning these two things: First, that as far as our ideas reach, no good reason can be assigned, why God should interpose to prevent the immortality of the soul; nothing of this sort having ever been urged, or produced, with the least appearance or colour of probability. And, secondly, good reasons may be assigned for the contrary supposition. The ends of the creation, as far as we know them, are confessedly the glory of God, and the good and happiness of his creatures. Now the longer good men are suffered to exist in an happy state, the more they must needs be blessed, and God be glorified: and by the perpetuation of such a state, we plainly perceive that the same great ends will be promoted for ever. But, further: These reasons against annihilation will not only eternally hold good, but be continually gathering new force and strength. The longer virtuous men live, in such a state, the fitter they must be for life; and therefore we may presume, the less will be the danger of extinction. Their faculties must grow, their capacities enlarge, and all their improvements increase, through every part of duration. Great advances must be ever made in knowledge, and virtue, and happiness.

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They must be continually more and more capable of contemplating, admiring, and enjoying the Author of all good, and the Fountain of all perfection. To imagine, after this progress, and these exaltations of their nature, that God should cut the thread of their existence, and put an end to their beings, is to suppose him acting, as far as we can judge, quite contrary to the reasons of things, and the chief ends of the creation: for it seems very evident to our understandings, that much more happiness is producible by a grant of immortality, than by any succession of spirits temporary and mortal; forasmuch as the happiness of the blessed must naturally rise in a very high proportion to the length of their existence. Again: By parity of reason, it might as well be concluded, that God will some time or other annihilate the angels, and destroy the whole host of heaven, as that he should take away the existence of just men made perfect. There will be, both for men and angels, an employment adequate to the eternity we are speaking of. They may search for ever into the divine perfections, and divine workmanship, without being able to exhaust the subjects, or even comprehend them. They may copy after God's moral excellence, striving to approach it nearer and nearer through all ages; and yet ever remain at an infinite distance from it. In short, nothing less than immortality, nothing less than an endless duration, can suit that transcendent object, for the study, adoration, and enjoyment, of which they were, both of them, originally created. These considerations, together with the arguments before produced from the frame and constitution of our minds, appear fully sufficient for the conviction of unprejudiced men. Yet, after all, though the doctrines of a future state, and the immortality of the soul, are supported by a great variety of clear and convincing proofs, arising from the mere light of natural reason; yet it is well and happy for us, that those proofs are enforced and confirmed by revelation; that we have assurances from Heaven of our perpetual existence, and that *life and immortality are fully brought to light in the gospel*. This gives a powerful sanction to the dictates of our consciences, and the decisions of our understandings. As the evidences of reason strengthen our faith, so the evidences of

faith establish the doctrines of reason; thereby leaving us doubly without excuse, if we reject the truth, or suffer our minds to be drawn into a disbelief of this most important article.

The time will only permit me to point out very briefly what use we ought to make of the foregoing doctrine. Are we then designed for immortality, and fitted with suitable faculties for an endless duration? How grateful a sense ought we to have of the Creator's goodness and bounty! What tributes of praise and thanksgiving are due for such mighty blessings, such inestimable privileges! What returns of pious adoration, and religious reverence, in will, word, and deed! But more especially ought we to take care, as the best and most acceptable expression of our gratitude, that we make a wise and proper use of these blessings, that we walk worthy of the high expectations, and the glorious prospect which he has set before us; that we demean ourselves in such manner as becomes those who are made little lower than the angels, and alike destined for immortality; that, by a diligent application to wisdom and virtue, we improve our minds as much as possible, and prepare them for eternity to the utmost advantage. On our conduct here depends all our success hereafter. If, by evil practices, and vicious habits, we lay the foundations of a miserable futurity, our joy will be turned into grief and terror, and the greatest of all blessings into the deepest calamity, and the direst curse. In the next life, vice and virtue will each produce its own natural effects, however external causes may co-operate with them. Every vice, every evil habit, that we carry with us into another world, will, like an evil spirit, haunt us for ever, and persecute us to all eternity. No fiends, no furies, will be able to torment men hereafter like sin and guilt; the rage and remorse of which no words can represent, no thoughts conceive. On the other hand, every grace, every virtue, every good habit, will enlarge our capacities for happiness, and be a further preparation for it. They will not only preserve the soul in perpetual health and ease, but prove inexhaustible sources of joy and gladness. They will likewise make it meet to partake of those unspeakable felicities which God has prepared for the righteous. And
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how blessed must that immortality be, where every thing within, and every thing without, administer delight, and conspire to augment and establish their happiness. Lastly : Since there will be another life, and that an eternal one, it must be very absurd to engage our affections deeply in this ; or to be immoderately solicitous about any of its vain and transitory enjoyments. To set our hearts on the mean and perishing objects of this world, is, in effect, to forget the privileges of our nature, and the joys and glories of a blessed immortality. What are hours, or days, or years ; nay, what is time itself, in comparison of an eternal duration ! This life can bear no proportion to the next ; and yet we suffer it almost to engross our thoughts, and run away with our affections. We regard this very short span of time, as if it was eternity ; and we regard eternity, as if it were nothing. Our reason plainly informs

us, that, supposing a future state dubious and uncertain, still we ought to be provided for the important chance, and become adventurers for another world. But since we have all the evidence and assurance that can, in reason, be expected, or even desired, what words are able to express the folly, or rather frenzy, of those, who slight such a good, and neglect so great salvation ! To conclude : If the greatest and most durable happiness that we are capable of wishing, be allowed to merit our attention and concern, then have we just cause to bend our thoughts this way, and devote our best endeavours to the attainment of it. Our true interest prompts us to withdraw our affections from the fleeting shadows of this life ; continually exhorting us to moderate our pursuit of *things temporal*, that we finally lose not the things which are eternal.

SECTION VII.

FROM THE

SERMONS of GEORGE FOTHERGILL, D. D.
Principal of ST. EDMUND'S HALL, Oxford.

SERMON I.

The Importance of a Religious Principle to personal Virtue and Happiness.

PSALM xxxvii. 31.

The law of his God is in his heart: none of his steps shall slide.

AMONG those unhappy consequences, which disputes about religion are usually found to draw after them, this is none of the least considerable—that, whilst they unsettle the minds of many, and actually overthrow the faith of some, they too generally draw off the attention of others from what always ought to be the principal object of it. It is true, knowledge may, by this means, be increased; so that most men shall become qualified, at least shall think themselves qualified, to discuss these points with skill and subtilty. But, I fear, we are too apt to rest here: to consider religion as a matter of notion only and speculation, as calculated for the purposes of intellectual entertainment, rather than of vital improvement in virtue and holiness: and, if so, our concern about religion ends where it ought only to begin; whilst we make that the whole business of it, which is indeed no more than an introduction to it.

Religion has not always been thus treated: in the Psalmist's days particularly we find, it was thought worthy, not only to fill the heads, and to employ the tongues, but to warm the hearts, of its professors. *The mouth of the righteous man*, it seems, as opportunities offered themselves, was exercised in wisdom, and his tongue would be talking of judgment.

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(Psalm xxxvii. 30.) So much regard, he well knew, the importance of divine truths demanded from him. But then, (Matt. xii. 34.) *out of the abundance of the heart his mouth spake* on such occasions. Nor was his discourse only instructive, but his life unblameable, because his sense of religion was hearty and affectionate. *The law of his God was in his heart: therefore none of his steps did slide.*

And, however the professors of religion may be altered, the nature of things is still the same. That religion, which will ever be of real service in the regulation of our conduct, must still be, as it was then, seated in the heart. *Out of the heart are the issues of life;* (Prov. iv. 23.) and nothing will be able effectually to give motion and direction to our several powers, which does not first affect this main spring within us. In proportion as religion is or is not the ruling principle in the heart, its influence on men's whole outward behaviour will be powerful and prevailing, or weak only and precarious. When the law of his God is in a man's heart, then, and then only, *none of his steps shall slide.*

The words contain a short, but just, description of one principal ingredient in the upright man's character, and an engaging recommendation of it from its happy effect upon his conduct. And, in order to consider them as usefully as may be, I shall endeavour, in the plainest manner I can,

I. First, To shew, what is implied in the expression, "*The law of his God is in his heart;*" and, who is intitled to that character.

II. Secondly, To illustrate the beneficial influence of such a principle, here expressed, by its preserving a man's steps from sliding. And,

III. Thirdly,

III. Thirdly, to subjoin an useful inference or two, resulting from the foregoing heads.

I. By the law of God, it is obvious to understand, in general, that rule of our actions which is bound upon our consciences by the authority of God, in what way soever the particulars of it come to our knowledge.

The heart is in Scripture variously used to signify the understanding, the memory, or the affections; and, according to any of these acceptations, the law of God may be said to be in the heart; indeed it must be so in each of them, fully to answer the character now before us. And,

1. To have the law of God in the heart, is to have it in the understanding: that is, not only to have a full conviction of the being of God, and proper notions of his attributes, but to be well acquainted with his will and our own duty in the several branches of it. This is what the Psalmist elsewhere expresses, by *having understanding in the way of godliness*: (Psal. ci. 2.) and, how necessary it is to have the law of God in the heart, in this sense of the word, previously to the others, is (I suppose) too evident to need any illustration. A due degree of knowledge in the nature and particulars of God's law is so necessary a preparative to the regular observance of it, that we can scarce take one step right without it. Nay, our very zeal, if not under the guidance of knowledge, instead of holding up our goings, will often be to us an occasion of falling. This point, therefore, must be first secured. And then,

2. We must have the law of God in the heart, as that stands for the thoughts and memory: that is, we must frequently call forth that knowledge, which is in the mind habitually, into its actual view and perception. This is what the Psalmist calls *meditating on the law of God*, and *exercising one's self in it*: (Psal. i. 2.) and this he, with great reason, represents as being the good man's employment day and night. For, it is certain, vain will the most complete knowledge of God's will be, if not frequently brought to remembrance. Truth will ever be found to influence men's practice in proportion, not as it is known, but as it is attended to, by them. Temptations, when present, will easily overpower such persuasions as are only habitual: and, in fact, more

souls are destroyed for want of consideration, than for lack of knowledge. However

3. The law of God, to have its proper efficacy, must not only be in the understanding and memory, but also in the love and affections: this is to have one's delight in the law of God; and is indeed the most proper sense of having it in the heart. It was thus the Psalmist was himself affected towards it, when, in the overflowing of his zeal, he cried out, *Oh how I love thy law!* (Psal. cxix. 97.) And, again, *The law of thy mouth is dearer unto me, than thousands of gold and silver.* (Ibid. 72.) We are informed by some, who profess to have an intimate acquaintance with human nature, that every man has some one favourite pursuit, some ruling passion, to which all others are only subordinate, and so, in case of interference, constantly give way. Now this, in the person I am describing, must be the law of God; that is, a regard to God's authority, a desire of pleasing, and a dread of offending him. *God's loving-kindness is*, to such a man, *better than life itself* (Psal. lxxiii. 3.); and nothing will be allowed to stand in competition with obedience to his commands.

Upon the whole: The man, that would be entitled to the character in my text, must neglect no opportunities of informing himself aright concerning the divine will and his own duty: which knowledge, when attained, he must not suffer to lie dormant within him; but must call it forth, into actual view, with frequency and seriousness, as a matter, not to be confined to the head, but to engage the heart; to be recollected and reviewed, not for the purposes only of speculation, but as a rule of conduct bound upon his conscience by the Author of his being, and the disposer of his happiness: until the importance of God's law, and a regard to his authority, becomes a consideration always present with his mind, always uppermost there; a principle ruling in his heart, and effectually diffusing its vital influence over his whole life and conversation.

This, I conceive, is the import of the expression, *the law of his God is in his heart*; and such the person intitled to that character: the excellency of which, and the great reason and encouragement we have to aspire after it, may appear, by considering,

II. Secondly, the beneficial influence of such a principle, as here expressed by preserving a man's steps from sliding.

The expression is figurative; and may denote the security and the steadiness of a man's conduct: and, in both respects, the principle of an awful regard to the divine will is highly beneficial. It gives security from error, from sin, from misery; and it gives steadiness and consistency, and by that means self-complacency and dignity, to the person possessed of it. All this a religious principle, seated in the heart, procures; generally, I mean, and for the most part, though not universally, or without exception: and that both by the blessing of God, and from its own natural tendency.

And, first, A sincerely devout frame of mind secures to us the above-mentioned advantages, by conciliating the blessing of Almighty God. How necessary the Divine favour is to the right ordering of our steps, every thinking man feels, and every ingenuous man will acknowledge. Accordingly, the book of Psalms (that invaluable treasure of the most exalted strains of rational piety) is every where full of petitions to this purpose. The royal Penman had in himself experienced the inability of man by his own wisdom to direct his steps, or by his own strength to preserve them from falling. Hence we find him continually imploring the Divine direction and support: *Order my steps in thy word, and so shall no wickedness have dominion over me!* (Psal. cxix. 133.) And, again, *Oh hold thou up my going in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not!* (Psal. xvii. 5.)

Now, if any thing may, by the light of nature, be known of God, or with certainty collected from thence concerning his methods of governing the moral world; of this we may be assured, that he will in a more especial manner favour and regard those of his children, whose hearts are warmed with an affectionate concern for the honour of his laws, and a filial awe of his authority. We are not, however, left to the deductions of our reason in this particular; God himself having, in his holy word, given us many explicit declarations to the same purpose: among which the following is introduced with a solemnity so remarkable, that, as I must not pass by it, so I need not add to it any other: *Thus saith*

the High and Lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity! whose name is Holy! I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit (Isaiah, lvii. 15.) : and, again, by the same Prophet, *To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word!* (Isaiah, lxvi. 6.)

But, farther: The temper of mind here recommended, is not only by God's promise entitled to receive, but has, in the course of his providence, an aptness to procure, the advantages above hinted at. And this you will now permit me to illustrate, a little more particularly, in regard to each of those advantages, in the order wherein I have already recited them:

1. To begin with that of security from error; and this both in matters wherein our belief, and those in which our practice, is concerned.

Where the principle of a true and rational piety has taken possession of the heart, error in religious matters, especially such as carries men to the lengths of schism, heresy, or infidelity, will not ordinarily find admittance. A man of this frame of mind proceeds in his inquiries with calmness and sedateness, with impartiality and freedom from prejudice, with modesty and humility. His understanding is well prepared for perceiving the evidences of religion, or of any fundamental article of it; and his will has no reluctance, no objection, to admitting them. If in his progress he finds (as even a sincere inquirer may find) some things hard to be understood, he will not presently give up what is plain and evident, for the sake of what as yet may seem somewhat doubtful or difficult. Difficulties, he considers, must, from the nature of things, attend our religion, supposing it true; and these therefore he will by no means admit as proofs that it is not so. He will, however, examine according to his abilities, whether the difficulties he meets with may not be surmounted by patience and attention; and, where his own abilities fail him, he will not refuse to call in all proper assistances; particularly those of persons, whom he has cause to presume, and is willing to believe, wiser than himself; and their's most especially, who are by God's own appointment set apart for this purpose.

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The truth is, it is from half-thinking, not free-thinking, that dangerous error or infidelity commonly arise; as, again, such half-thinking is generally occasioned by the want of an hearty desire to know and to do the will of God. Where the heart is not animated by the law of God, the man will probably exert just thought enough (and a very little thought will be sufficient) to raise a few doubts about our holy religion, without farther troubling himself to pursue them to any rational conclusion, or vouchsafing to seek for any solution of them from others: or, it may be, he has been far enough from home to have seen much hypocrisy or much bigotry under the profession of Christianity; and he will not be persuaded, but that every appearance of it is fairly resolvable into one or other of these principles: nay, if vanity or vicious prejudice strongly predominate in his constitution, he may perhaps be at the pains of working up such difficulties or such abuses in religion into formidable objections against it. But where sincere piety and a sound mind happily unite in conducting the important inquiry, the case is far otherwise: the arguments in favour of every divine institution will have their due weight, and those against it no more than their due weight: and then, we need neither be *ashamed of the gospel of Christ* (Rom. i. 16.), nor afraid least it should fail of approving itself, to such an inquirer, as being *the power of God and the wisdom of God* (1 Cor. i. 23, 24.); however its doctrines may, to the superficial or the conceited thinker, be a stumbling-block; and its precepts, to the vicious and debauched liver, foolishness.

And, as this is generally found true of misconceptions in matters of faith, so is it no less applicable to errors of a moral nature, or such as more immediately relate to the conduct of life. A sincere resolution to act agreeably to the law of God, is ordinarily one of the most faithful interpreters of it. It holds good in relation to practice, as well as belief, that *if any man will do God's will* (John, 7. 17.), or is ready and desirous to do it, he shall know of the action or undertaking, *whether it be of God or not*. He, who has the authority of God always uppermost upon his mind, and who resolves, at all hazards, to submit his

actions to it, usually finds his duty lying plainly enough before him. Mistakes about practice generally arise from some perverse inclination, some impetuous desire, some *carnal affection not subject to the law of God*. (Rom. viii. 7.) These first make men deliberate about questions, which to an honest and good heart would have been no questions at all; and then hurry them on to a determination of the affected debate agreeably to the strength, not of evidence in the thing, but of inclination in themselves. Hence *the way of the wicked is said to be as darkness* (Prov. iv. 19.); and the wicked are represented as *groping in the dark at noon-day* (Job, v. 14.): they perplex themselves in the clearest cases: and, no wonder; since, in this sense also, *they love darkness rather than light, because their intentions and desires are evil* (Joh. iii. 19.). On the contrary, the upright man sees his duty clearly, because he is willing to perform it conscientiously: *The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto a perfect day* (Prov. iv. 18.). But,

Secondly, An affectionate and awful regard to the authority of God, is a most effectual preservative against sin and wickedness.

This is indeed a point so evident, that it will hardly admit of any illustration. Sin, in the very notion of it, is a transgression of God's law: and, it is certain, all wilful transgression of God's law must proceed, if not from a settled disbelief of his providence, at least from a present disregard of the important consequences of it. Accordingly, *My heart sheweth me the wickedness of the ungodly* (saith the Psalmist), *that there is no fear of God before his eyes* (Psal. xxxvi. 1.). Into the want of this principle he justly resolves all the vices and villainies of which men are guilty. And, in fact, where this principle is wanting, no sense of honour, no fear of disgrace, no dread of punishment, will be a sufficient security. But *the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple* (Psalm xix.). The fear of God will preserve a man's innocence, when nothing else can reach him. The darkness is no darkness, can promise no concealment, and is therefore no temptation, to that man, who has always upon his mind a prevailing sense of his presence,

to whom darkness and light are both
Psalm cxxxix. 12.) There is no
 engagement so pressing as not to allow
 time to ask this short question: *How can*
I do this great wickedness and sin against
God? (*Gen. xxxix. 9.*) And this ques-
 tion, when properly attended to, must
 needs silence the most inviting sollicita-
 tion. The enticements of pleasure, and
 even the dread of the most powerful
 human resentment, every allurement that
 can address itself to that part of our nature
 in which we are most weakly guarded,
 shall fall before this one consideration,
How can I do this great wickedness and sin
against God? (*Gen. xxxix. 9.*)

And, as a sincere principle of piety is
 a most powerful, so it is usually a most
 lasting, preservative against sin. Where a
 full awe of the Divine Being, an hearty
 desire of obeying and pleasing him, and a
 prevailing fear of offending him, is deeply
 rooted in the soul, such a frame of mind,
 notwithstanding the depravity of our na-
 ture, is seldom completely lost. Over-
 powered indeed it may be for a time;
 but it generally, sooner or later, re-
 asserts its dominion; and if, in the mean
 while, it cannot restrain the man from
 sin, it however makes his progress in it
 less easy and agreeable; and gives the
 overtures of divine grace a more advan-
 tageous influence upon the mind. Let
Jeroboam (*1 Kings, xiii. 4.*) receive never
 so many awakening intimations of God's
 displeasure; let *his right hand be dried*
up, and the son of his bosom cut off in the
flower of his age (*1 Kings, xiv.*); yet all
 this shall be lost upon him; for, we
 read, *after this Jeroboam returned not from*
his evil way (*1 Kings, xiii. 33.*), but
 persisted in his impiety and idolatry.
 But, let *David* (*2 Sam. xii. 13.*) receive
 a seasonable reproof from a prophet, and
 he shall presently confess and lament his foul
 offence, and *offer unto God the sacrifice of a*
broken and contrite heart. (*Psal. li.*) The
 cause of so remarkably different a recep-
 tion of the divine chastisements was
 plainly this: *David was, in the prevail-*
ing part of his character, a man of piety,
one who had the law of his God in his heart:
 whilst *Jeroboam* appears to have been an
 entire stranger to the power of godliness,
 and only for secular purposes to have
 made use of the form of it. So true is
 the observation of *Solomon* in this sense
 also; the *just man* (*Prov. xxiv. 16.*), he

who has a right principle, *falleth seven*
times and riseth again; but the wicked falleth
into mischief; because he falleth without
 recovery. Which brings me to shew,

Thirdly, That an hearty regard to the
 law of God is the most secure preservative
 we can have against danger, disappoint-
 ment, and misery.

I say, the most secure preservative;
 because it must not be expected, in the
 present state of things, that piety itself
 should be found an infallible security
 against danger or disappointment, any
 more than against errors or failings. As
there are wicked men, to whom it hap-
peneth according to the work of the righte-
ous; so there are good men, to whom it
happeneth according to the work of the
wicked. (*Eccl. viii. 14.*) And yet, not-
 withstanding this, there is great reason to
 believe, the real happiness of this life,
 though not always the seeming prosper-
 ity of it, is distributed among the sons
 of men with a more equitable hand than
 careless observers may be apt to imagine.
 And if, instead of forming our judgments
 from present appearances, we would
remember the end (*Eccles. vii. 36.*), and
 take into our estimate the whole of God's
 dispensations towards particular persons,
 even in this life, we should more rarely
 judge or do amiss.

There is a way, which seemeth right
unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways
of death. (*Prov. xiv. 12.*) We often
 vainly flatter ourselves, we shall gain
 some favourite point, or avoid some
 dreaded mischief, by some more certain and
 more compendious method than that which
 the law of God prescribes or allows of;
 and possibly for some time all things may
 look fair and promising. But Infinite
 Wisdom hath innumerable ways of de-
 feating our best-concerted projects, or
 even of rendering us, perhaps, still more
 unhappy by the present seeming success
 of them. *He that getteth riches and not*
by right (says the Prophet) *shall leave*
them in the midst of his days; and at his
end shall be a fool. (*Jer. xvii. 11.*) The
 same is true of every other acquisition.
 No sooner are we departed from the safe
 road of our duty, but we have put our-
 selves out of God's protection, and
 thrown ourselves at the mercy of every
 cross accident: hence disappointments
 and afflictions; and these falling with
 double weight upon a mind, conscious of
 I i having

having brought them upon itself, and unsupported by the aids and comforts of religion, those only present helps in trouble. Whereas, so long as we continue in the plain path of God's commandments, we not only secure his favour, but engage the friendship of the valuable part of mankind; we escape many interferences and rencounters with the passions and the vices of others, to which a deviation from duty would have exposed us: and, should any persons, without provocation given on our part, be ill-disposed towards us, they will scarcely, for their own sakes, venture to *harm us so long as we are followers of that which is good.* (1 Pet. iii. 13.) But (which is most considerable) if, after all, we should be permitted by Providence to fall into circumstances of seeming distress; yet disappointments will lose much of their bitterness, and even calamities of their pressure, whilst we are conscious of having secured his loving-kindness who knows what is best for us; and who is both able and willing to *make all things work together to us for good.* (Rom. viii. 28.)

Such then is the security which a sincere principle of piety ordinarily gives a man: security from error, from sin, from misery. And it is equally conducive to the steadiness and consistency of his conduct: for, in this sense also, *none of his steps shall slide.*

It is the Prophet's just observation, that *the wicked are as the troubled sea, when it cannot rest.* (Isa. lvii. 20.) The various and opposite motives which successively, and not seldom at the same instant of time, agitate a mind destitute of religion, naturally create distraction in deliberating, diffidence in resolving, and inconstancy in acting. A man, in such a situation, is always dissatisfied, and therefore always uneasy; and, because always uneasy, ever unsettled. And accordingly we find him continually changing his measures; and, as *the double-minded man* in course must be, *unstable in all his ways.* (Jam. i. 8.) How different the case of that man, who has *the law of his God in his heart!* He has a plain rule, and an honest mind, to direct the application of it. He first *ponders well the path of his goings,* and then *turneth not to the right-hand or to the left.* (Prov. iv. 26, 27.) He first takes due care to inform his

judgment, and then pursues what that tells him is right, without deviation; and well knowing, what is right at one time must be right for ever in the same circumstances. He is steady without obstinacy; and proceeds with uniformity of conduct, because *with singleness of heart fearing God.* (Col. iii. 22.)

The excellency of the principle now before us, in this respect, might easily be pursued through every relation, every station and condition of life. But never is its influence more seasonably exerted than in unquiet and intricate times: and such seasons, the man possessed of it will not needlessly expose himself to danger; nor, where danger is unavoidable, will he refuse those succours which reason and prudence offer. But, then, he absolutely rejects all expedients inconsistent with God's law: and, after the use of fair and honest means, is not afraid to trust Providence with the issue. In the result, such a man generally extricates himself with more honour and more satisfaction, than any of those projectors who have not God in all their thoughts; and, whilst these latter *kindling a fire and compassing themselves with sparks,* and for some time vainly *walking in the light of their fire and in the sparks that they have kindled,* shall lie down in sorrow (Isa. i. 11.): *Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness* (Psal. cxii. 4.)—Light, to direct his steps, to cheer his heart, to clear up his innocence, and to *make his just-dealing as the noon-day.* (Psal. xxxvii. 6.)

And now, upon a view of the foregoing particulars, we may see the justness of the Psalmist's declaration, *Blessed is the man, whose strength is in thee! in whose heart are thy ways!* (Psal. lxxxiv. 3.) and the great reason each of us hath to implore the divine grace in his language, *Oh, knit my heart unto thee, that I may fear thy name.* (Psal. lxxxvi. 11.) But I hasten, as was proposed,

III. Thirdly and lastly, To subjoin an inference or two, arising from what has been said.

And, in the first place, you will, from what has appeared, readily infer with me, the great usefulness and importance of a good education of youth.

We have seen, what advantages arise from having the law of God in the understanding, the memory, and the affec-

But at no season of life can this great point be so well secured as in tender years. It is then truths of a moral or religious nature find their way most easily into the understanding, make the deepest impression in the memory, and take the most lasting hold of the affections. It is then good principles are most readily acquired; and principles then acquired are least liable to be over-powered or lost.

It is one great misfortune in man's present constitution, that he has not only a law in his members warring against the law in his mind (Rom. vii. 23.), but that this carnal principle has the advantage of first possession. The powers of the mind continue for some years in a kind of non-age, whilst those of sense and appetite are daily advancing to a considerable degree of strength and vigour: by which means these latter have often so far gained the ascendant, as to render it extremely difficult for reason and conscience ever afterwards to dispossess them. Now, an early good education is an excellent remedy against this inconvenience. Places of education are a kind of public repositories, from whence that observation and experience and justness of thought, which the young person has not of his own growth, is applied to his use out of the common stock; and hence also, not only knowledge is dispensed to yet unfurnished minds, but restraint and discipline to appetites yet capable of being regulated by them. Hence, in short, the intellectual faculties receive proper assistance, whilst the sensitive are kept within their due bounds. Should this proceeding be called, infilling of prejudices; I see not any thing so very formidable in the charge. If youth be by nature in some degree prejudiced against virtue and goodness, and would be much more so by custom and example, what method can be better suited to the exigencies of our present condition, than that of seasonably counteracting those prejudices by others of a more salutary tendency, and more agreeable to the genuine and undepraved constitution of our minds; such as are calculated to restore our reason to its just pre-eminence, and to reinstate conscience in that dominion for which it was originally designed? Or, where can be the mighty harm of rescuing those souls from the snare of the

devil, who would otherwise be taken captives by him at his will (2 Tim. ii. 26.); and of rendering them vessels unto honour, sanctified and meet for their proper master's use, and prepared unto every good work? (2 Tim. ii. 21.)

Again: As we may, from what has been said, observe the advantages of an early good education; so it is obvious to infer farther, what ought to be the principal aim and employment of it.

Where-withal then should a young man be taught to cleanse his way? Even by ruling himself after God's word. (Psal. cxix. 9.) It is this, we have seen, which alone will be able to conduct us through the several stages of life with security and steadiness: this therefore is the point which ought always to be in the view both of teacher and learner. Other knowledge may undoubtedly be highly ornamental and highly useful, nay, to different persons in different degrees, highly necessary. But, after all, it is the fear of God that must cleanse our way, which must sanctify all our pursuits, and be both the beginning and end of whatever deserves the name of wisdom. Young minds must, therefore, by all means, be seasoned with an holy awe and reverence for him that ought to be feared. If this necessary principle, *this good seed* (Comp. Matt. xiii. Mark, iv. Luke, viii.), be not sown in the heart now, it will scarcely ever after bring forth fruit unto perfection; it will either fall upon hearts already hardened by an habitual course of sin; or, however, *the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, or the lusts of other things*, will be apt to spring up with it and choke it. But if it be sown early in the good ground (2 Kin. xxii. 19.) of a pure and tender heart, it will most probably rise in a plentiful harvest of exemplary virtue and holiness.

We have the force of an early piety remarkably exemplified in the case of Obediah. He was governor of the house of Ahab (1 Kin. xviii. 3.); a king who had sold himself to work wickedness beyond all that were before him (1 Kin. xvi. 33. and xxi. 25.), and whose wife Jezebel seems to have had nothing so much at heart as the destruction of all the Lord's Prophets. (1 Kin. xviii. 4.) These were trying circumstances. For the first favourite of such a master, and the chief officer in such a court, notwithstanding

his precarious situation, and (as it were) in despite of her displeasure on whose favour its continuance must have greatly depended,—*to hide the Prophets of the Lord by fifty in a cave, and to feed them with bread and water.* This was a proceeding not very reconcileable with the maxims of worldly policy. And yet, we cease to wonder at a conduct so uncommonly brave and generous, after himself has explained the true grounds of it, *I, thy servant, fear the Lord from my youth.* (1 Kin. xviii. 12.)

Once more: If the advantages of an early religious education are so great, what fruits may justly be expected, both by God and man, from those persons, who happily enjoy this inestimable benefit?

Need I remind you, how eminently many of us are concerned in this reflection? Whilst the far greatest part of mankind about us are continually busied in *taking thought for their life what they shall eat and what they shall drink* (Matt. vi. 31.), and procuring by the sweat of their faces these necessary accommodations of it, we are, by our very situation, removed from the bodily labours, and in great measure from the distracting cares, of this world: we are at full liberty, nay by peculiar encouragements invited, to *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness* (Matt. vi. 33.); whilst not only by his general promise, but by special provisions for the same purpose, *all these things are added unto us.* But, farther:

Even those of our studies here, which may seem to have no direct tendency to form in us a religious principle, are however of great use, if rightly improved, in supporting and cherishing it. When we turn the eye of the understanding inward upon itself, the Divinity meets us in every thought, and calls upon us to adore that goodness, by which our minds as well as our *bodies are fearfully and wonderfully made.* If we look abroad, *the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work.* (Psal. xix. 1.) Throughout all our researches into nature, we trace the footsteps of stupendous Wisdom and Majesty, obliging us to cry out with the Psalmist, *O Lord, how glorious are thy works! Thy thoughts are very deep!* (Psal. xcii. 5, 6.) And, should any among us be so brutish as not to consider this, yet the stated

returns of our *morning and evening sacrifice*, and the laws by which you *compel them to come in to the more immediate presence of their Creator and Preserver*, their Redeemer and Sanctifier, can hardly fail of striking the minds of the most unthinking, with some degree of awe and veneration for that tremendous Being, *who is very greatly to be feared in the council of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him.* (Psal. lxxxix. 7.)

Let me add, in justice to these institutions, that lest our devotion should degenerate into superstition, or be over-heated into enthusiasm, sound learning is here taught to go hand-in-hand with unaffected piety. Our devotion, not spoiled by vain philosophy, is here regulated by sober reason, and adorned by a due application to every branch of useful knowledge. Our holy religion is indeed *all glorious within* (Psal. xlv. 13.): but she never appears with more gracefulness or dignity, than when the sciences are (as it is here best provided that they always shall be) *the virgins that be her fellows, and that bear her company.* (Psal. xlv. 14.)

What remains then, but that *having these great and precious privileges* (with which many others might be mentioned), we should improve them to the purposes for which they are given us, *perfecting holiness in the fear of God.* We expect, many of us (I suppose), shortly to be called forth, from these retirements, into a world, where we shall be sure to meet with a great variety of temptations and trials: and I need not now observe to you, how much will probably depend upon the preparation at first made for this most interesting conflict. Let us then lay hold on the opportunity we here enjoy, for *taking to us the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand in the evil day, and having done all to stand.* (Eph. iv.)

Upon the whole, then, and to conclude: The principle, which I have all along been inculcating and recommending, by explaining its nature and illustrating its usefulness, is that of an awful and affectionate regard to the law and authority of Almighty God. And that this important principle may have its perfect work upon every one of us, let us always bear in mind, that we are every moment under the inspection of God's

God's all-seeing eye: that *there is not a word in our tongue, but he knoweth it altogether; not a thought within our breast, but he understandeth it long before* (Psalm xvi. 8.): he at present marks all our steps, so he will hereafter call us to an impartial account, and assign us our portion of everlasting happiness or endless torment according to the righteous judgment which shall then be passed upon them.—These truths let us remember, not in general only and historically, as positions to which we yield a merely speculative assent, and which we can upon occasion demonstrate to others; but let us bring them home to our hearts and consciences, as truths of the most serious concern, of the last importance to us.—If thus, like holy David, we *set God always before us*, (Psalm xvi. 8.) like him, too, we shall not be moved. The apprehension of God's presence shall be the guard of our innocence and the support of our steps here; until the enjoyment of his presence shall be our exceeding great reward for evermore hereafter.

S E R M O N II.

The Profitableness of Godliness illustrated.

I TIMOTHY, iv. 8.

Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

WITHOUT entering into a full and particular account of the occasion of these words, and the relation they stand in to the context, we need only observe, that the Apostle is here making a comparison between bodily exercise and godliness. The former (whatever might be meant by it, which is matter of dispute among commentators) he seems to intimate, is not without its use: it is profitable; but then it profiteth little; its use is very much confined; either very small in degree, very narrow in extent, or very short in duration. Whereas the use of the latter is of a more excellent, more extensive, more lasting nature: *It is profitable unto all things*: its profitableness reaches to every circumstance, every period of our existence. It very far ex-

cels that of the other, even in this life; and yet it does not, like that, terminate with it. It will accompany us into the other world, and will be as endless as our very being. *Godliness is profitable unto all things; having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*

By godliness we sometimes understand the performance of our duty to God, abstracted from the consideration of our duty to ourselves or others, and thus the term is often used in the sacred writings. But, I conceive, the Apostle did not in this place use, nor is it necessary for us to consider, it in this limited sense, but rather as taking in the whole compass of our duty; or perhaps as meant principally of our duty to God, but then not as opposed to those duties we owe to our neighbour and ourselves, but as productive of them, and comprehending them under it.

My business then will be, to recommend to you the practice of virtue and religion from the profitableness of it. The advantages here proposed are of two sorts, respecting this life and the next; and of each, it may be proper to treat distinctly and apart, because if either of them be omitted, the recommendation of godliness will not be so complete or so generally successful: but when godliness comes recommended by advantages of both kinds, there can (one would think) be no room for deliberating about so gainful a proposal.

I shall therefore endeavour to illustrate the truth of the Apostle's assertion in my text, with regard,

I. *To the life that now is*: and,

II. *To that which is to come.*

After which I would leave upon your minds a caution or two relating to this subject, by way of conclusion from the whole.

The life that now is, is an expression which may be understood two ways: either of the real happiness of this life, as abstracted from all outward advantages of riches, honours, and the like; or of that happiness which is generally apprehended to consist in these outward advantages. This is far from being a distinction without a difference. For, though the generality of mankind are apt to confound the real happiness of life with the outward possessions of it, yet Scripture, reason, and constant experience,

teach us, that they are often separated, and should always be by us distinguished, from each other. And accordingly there are two methods of illustrating the point before us: one is, by shewing the profitableness of godliness by itself, and in preference to all other pursuits or schemes of human happiness; the other is, by shewing its profitableness, not in preference to other pursuits, but from its conduciveness to the success of them. I shall confine myself to neither of these methods; but shall endeavour to make out this single proposition, which seems to comprehend them both; namely, that *godliness is the most promising method for the attainment of the good things of this world, as far as they are necessary or conducive to happiness.*

The good things of this world are of different kinds, and go by various names: but the principal of them, according to the common estimation, those of them, however, which the time will permit us at present to consider, are usually called riches: and, in regard to these, the limitation just laid down is more especially to be attended to. For, if men will understand by riches, nothing but large estates or immense possessions, &c. if they will allow nothing to come under that denomination but an abundance of superfluities, either to be hoarded up for no profit to the owner save the beholding of it with his eyes, or to be thrown away upon his extravagancies or his vices: if this, I say, be men's notion of riches, then we dare not undertake for godliness, that it shall be instrumental in the procuring of them. For, as to the promise of God, he has indeed engaged to supply the wants of his faithful servants, but not to provide them with any such abundance, or for any such purposes as these; and as to the natural tendency of things, godliness is so far from attaining riches of this kind, that it will hardly allow us to desire or seek after them. But then we say at the same time, that such abundance, how necessary soever it may be to answer some men's conception of riches, is by no means needful, nor (if rightly considered) really conducive to happiness; it being generally found, that in proportion as a man's riches exceed the middle state, his cares increase, and his enjoyment lessens. And, surely, it should not be made any exception against the profit-

ableness of godliness in this respect, that it does not procure for us such abundance as could not make us more happy than we might be without it; and would, in all probability, make us much less so.

The truth is, to think that *a man's life consists in the abundance of things which he possesseth* (Luke, xii. 15.), is to make a very false judgment of it. To be rich is certainly a term of comparative import; not to be estimated from any determinate quantity of the good things of life, but from the just proportion of a man's possessions to his wants and his wishes. He whose desires are fully satisfied with what he possesseth, and whose incomes rather exceed than fall short of his necessities, may properly be accounted rich, be the quantity of his substance what it will: rich, I say, he may properly be accounted as far as happiness is concerned; and farther than that, I suppose, no wise man will desire an enurance of any thing in this world.

But if this account be true (as I am persuaded it is), then the profitableness of godliness in this particular may easily be made out. If to be rich, is to have one's possessions duly adjusted to his exigencies real or imaginary, *godliness with contentment must be great gain* (1 Tim. vi. 6.); inasmuch as it requires us to contract both our desires and our expences; to be moderate in our pleasures, and frugal in our management, and *in whatever state we are, therewith to be content.* (Phil. iv. 1.)

Should you say, "This is, at best, but a negative way of growing rich, or indeed not so properly a way of growing rich as of remaining contentedly poor;" I might reply as before, that, so long as our desires are satisfied, and our exigencies answered, we are sufficiently rich for all the purposes of life. But, not to insist farther upon this, possibly you may have a view to the raising a fortune, and making what is usually called a decent provision for your own accommodation, and that of your respective families or dependents, in life. And something we dare undertake for godliness in this respect also. We may not indeed promise that it shall make any man suddenly or immensely rich, but that it shall put him in a way of becoming competently so: nor may we promise that it shall do even this, certainly and

infallibly,

infallibly (that no human method, whether of virtue or vice, can pretend to do); but as constantly, as, nay far more constantly than, the contrary practice: always taking along with us this equitable supposition, that the votaries of each set out in the world in equal circumstances, and with the like advantages or disadvantages in other respects.

That the good man has a fairer prospect of competent success in his temporal affairs than his unrighteous neighbour, may be illustrated by considerations drawn both from the ordinary dispensations of Providence, and from the natural tendency of things. The Apostle refers the prospect which godliness has of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come, wholly to the promise of God; and it is certain, that the greatest stress ought always to be laid upon that, indeed the whole stress with regard to the life to come. But though temporal prosperity is confessedly the gift of God, yet (according to his wise appointment in the constitution of things) the practice of virtue does in its own tendency not a little contribute to procure it. The vicious habits of idleness, prodigality, litigiousness, and the like, are generally found in fact as inconsistent with prosperity as they are with godliness. Nobody can have missed of observing, what obstructions they lay in a man's way to the getting of an estate, or what difficulties they bring him to in the keeping of one. And your own experience may (I hope) sufficiently inform you, what a beneficial tendency in both respects those good qualities of industry, frugality, prudent management, &c. naturally have, which are either the necessary parts, or however the usual attendants, of godliness.

Vice is indeed in general an expensive thing: it makes large demands upon a man's estate, and is continually crying, *Give, give* (Prov. xxx. 15.); whereas virtue and godliness are provident and careful. And, though they may make some deductions from a man's time or his substance for the service of God, or the relief of his needy brethren; yet these fall far short of such deductions as are necessarily occasioned by the maintenance of the greatest part of vices. Indeed, when conducted by the rules of prudence and discretion (and that they should be otherwise, neither virtue nor godliness re-

quire), they are, in their nature, no way prejudicial to a man's prosperity; and if we take in the blessing of God attending them, they are often greatly conducive to it: *There is that scattereth and yet increaseth, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, yet it tendeth to poverty.* (Prov. xi. 24.)

Nor does the practice of virtue and honesty only promote men's temporal interests directly and immediately, but also by means of that credit and reputation which it secures to him from those about him. A man of character for integrity is one whom all men desire to have intercourse with: they can here carry on their dealings agreeably, because freely; and freely, because without suspicion of deceit or knavish design. Whereas the dishonest person when once discovered (and long undiscovered such an one must not expect to be) is avoided by every fair dealer: all correspondence with him is obstructed by the tedious forms of mistrust and jealousy. And, what the consequence of this must be with regard to the success of any occupation or employment; as on the other hand, how very serviceable the character of uprightness is in carrying on any beneficial commerce; are points, which I suppose, I need no otherwise illustrate, than by appealing to your own observation of what every day passes before you in the world.

Add to all this, what is a very material consideration, that though the quantity of wealth which the virtuous and the wicked man possess should be equal, nay, though that of the latter should be far greater, yet as to every purpose for which wealth can be desirable, *a small thing that the righteous hath is better than great riches of the ungodly.* (Psal. xxxvii. 16.)

For let us suppose (what sometimes in fact happens), that the unrighteous man should amass together great possessions, should, in the Prophet's expression, *load himself with thick clay* (Hab. ii. 6.); yet, alas! to what purpose is all that expence of time, of ease, of innocence, which he has been at in the accumulation of so much treasure? Why, perhaps, that he may have the beholding of it with his eyes, without the power to eat thereof: or, perhaps, that he may make it subservient to his impure lusts, or squander away that and his health together upon his ex-

travagancies: or, perhaps, that he may be forced to surrender it to those attacks which his irregular acquisition of it will probably provoke against him: or (if it elcape these usual attendants upon *wealth gotten by vanity* (Prov. xiii. 11.) and indirect means), that he may convey it with a curse to his posterity, and so, by ministering fuel to their lusts, and occasion to their intemperance, make them also miserable in both worlds.—Surely there is nothing extremely desirable in all this! and yet—*so is every one that heapeth up treasure unto himself, and is not rich towards God!* (Luke, xii. 21.)

But where the blessing of the Lord maketh rich, he addeth no such sorrow with it. (Prov. x. 22.) When this world's goods come into the upright man's hand, they generally meet with quite different success. One great part of those losses men most frequently sustain, is occasioned by the ill-regulated passions of those about them. But a greater security against these, under the divine Providence, there cannot be, than the practice of godliness: *For who is he, ordinarily speaking, that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?* (1 Peter, iii. 13.) The fair and honest methods by which the good man acquires his wealth, silence the murmurs of envy; and his inoffensive use and benevolent employment of it, disarms even malice itself, and *makes his very enemies be at peace with him.* (Prov. xvi. 7.) Hence the possessions of a good man are generally transmitted unenvied and entire, and (which is more) with a blessing to those that come after him; having first enabled him to live decently and creditably, agreeably to his station, and answerably to the innocent customs, the reasonable expectations, of those about him: and (which is the greatest commendation) having given him opportunities of relieving and supplying the wants of his fellow-christians; and so of *laying up for himself a lasting treasure in heaven, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.* (Matt. vi. 20.)

These are the riches, which are the general rewards of the honest endeavours of an upright man: general, I say, because we do not pretend to say, universal. *Time and chance will happen to all human affairs: The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor yet bread to the wise, nor riches to men*

of understanding. (Eccl. ix. 11.) God has wisely so ordered matters, as that the connection between godliness and temporal prosperity should not be absolutely necessary. This might, and probably would, have been misinterpreted, as leaving the affairs of the world wholly to second causes; or it might, by too forcibly recommending virtue upon present motives, have in great measure diminished the praise, and destroyed the rewardableness, of it: above all, it might have encouraged even well-disposed men to *live too much at ease in their possessions;* (Eccles. xli. 1.) and might have suffered them to forget, that the best part of their inheritance is yet to be expected and fought for in quite another country.

II. Which brings me to consider the other branch of the profitableness of godliness, namely, its having promise of the life that is to come.

And, indeed, notwithstanding all that hath as yet been said in favour of godliness, our recommendation of it would be very incomplete, if we could proceed no farther: for, without the supposal of a happy immortality to come after this short life, of what importance could all the riches and affluence that can be found in it, appear to a being capable, as man is, of carrying his views infinitely beyond it!—Here, then, the profitableness of godliness most eminently displays itself; in that it doth not, after providing for our accommodation in this inconsiderable portion of our existence, leave us without any further prospects; but secures to us a reversion of happiness, complete enough to fill the capacities, and to run commensurate with the duration of our immortal souls.

I inquire not here, what evidences the heathen world had of the reality of such an everlasting state of happiness to good men. It is certainly much more safe and satisfactory for us Christians to ground our expectations, as my text grounds our encouragement, upon the promise of God: and it should be sufficient for us, that the foundation of God standeth sure, with regard to this most important article. In whatever doubts unassisted reason might have left us about a future state, *the veil is now by revelation taken away.* (1 Cor. iii. 16. 18.) We all now, with open face, behold the glory of the Lord: a glory, the assurances whereof are so full and

and exprefs in holy Scripture, that we may call it the glory, not which shall be, but which is already, revealed : revealed, indeed, it is not, as to the substance or particular manner of it, because it is a glory too big for our narrow capacities to comprehend, too bright for our feeble sight to contemplate : but revealed it is so fully as to the certainty and the boundless duration of it, that it is as unnecessary, as it would be endless, to cite particular passages in proof of this doctrine ; a doctrine, the evidences whereof shine forth in every page of the gospel.

Here, also, we may venture to speak to godly men with less reserve or diffidence ; to confine the promise wholly to them, and to assure every such person of infallible success. The good things of this life, being of small value and short continuance, are sometimes denied to God's greatest favourites, and are, by the more successful among these, shared in common with persons of a different character. *Our wise and gracious Father causeth his sun to shine on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.* (Mat. v. 45.) But, in the other world, the case will be very different. At our departure hence, we shall find an *impassable gulph fixed* (Luke, xvi. 26.), a final separation made, betwixt the opposite parties : and, whilst *God shall send darkness upon those, these shall have light in their dwellings.* The good man may meet with disappointments and losses in the life that now is : but the life to come, is that *better part* of the promise made to godliness, *which shall not be taken away from him.* (Luke, x. 42.)

And, certainly, when we are secure as to this part of the promise, we need not be very solicitous about exceptions in the other. Everlasting happiness is a pearl of such inestimable price, that our conduct would be fully justified, should we *part with all we have* (Matt. xiii. 46.) in this world for the purchase of it. Let us allow to a life of sin all the present advantages over a life of godliness that imagination can give it : let us allow (what is all that it can pretend to, and far more than it has ever yet made good) that it is the certain and the only method of securing to ourselves an easy, a plentiful, an honourable, passage through this world : yet, what is there in all this, supposing it must be succeeded by an eternity of

torment, sufficient to engage a rational choice ? Put the case, that the godly man, even on the account of his godliness, were constantly exposed to disappointment and distress, whilst his unrighteous neighbour should as constantly succeed in his schemes of gain and grandeur ; yet, after we have followed each of them to his grave, we have seen an end of the one's happiness, and of the other's misery : here the good man confessedly *rests from his labours* (Rev. xiv. 13.) ; nor is it pretended by the greatest admirers of the wicked man here, that *his pomp shall follow him* hereafter. (Psal. xlix. 17.) Could we suppose, indeed, that this were to be to both the period of their existence, I will not say, but the life of the good man might, with some show of reason, be counted madness ; whilst the prosperous sinner might be thought to have managed tolerably well. But—what if each of them has an eternity of happiness or misery still behind ! what if they are now to change conditions for ever ! what if he that *in this life received his evil things* (Luke, xvi. 25.) is to be for ever comforted, and he that *received his good things* for ever tormented ! who does not see where the madness lies, even if all that has been supposed were found constantly true in regard to the situation of good and bad men in this world ? But, if the supposition itself is utterly false, as I have (I hope, sufficiently) proved it to be ; if godliness gives us not only an equal, but a much fairer, chance for happiness in this life, and over-and-above the sole title to, and an infallible assurance of, everlasting happiness in the next ; I will not say, to which side the madness is to be charged. A wrong choice, in a case so plain, and in an affair also of such infinite importance, is what one could hardly think possible, did we not see it in numberless instances actually made.

Upon the whole, then, ye see your calling, brethren ; what you may expect from the service of God and the practice of godliness : no less than the life that now is, and that which is to come : the former generally, and for the most part ; the latter universally, and without exception. *If now it seemeth evil unto you to serve the Lord upon these terms, choose you this day whom you will serve.* (Josh. xxiv. 15.) *The wages of sin* (Rom. vi. 25.), we own, may possibly be some trivial gain,

gain, some momentary gratification, in this life; but will far more probably be disappointment and vexation even here; and will certainly be death, eternal death and torment, hereafter: whereas, the gift of God, to his faithful servants, is life, temporal and eternal; that is, happiness as great as is consistent with their condition during their abode in this world; but happiness complete and endless in the other.—*Ye have, therefore, life and death set before you.* (Deut. xxx. 19.) Be just to yourselves. Choose life. *Remember this, and shew yourselves men.* (Isai. xlii. 8.)

Permit me only to leave upon your minds a caution or two relating to the present subject, by way of inference from what has been said. And,

First, We should beware of allowing secular motives the principal influence upon our minds.

For, though the gospel, as well as the law, sometime makes use of such inducements, yet this (we may observe) is done but very sparingly, and never with any great stress laid upon them. Motives of this kind are indeed adapted only to a weak and imperfect state of goodness, and such as falls short of those exalted attainments, that are expected in us Christians. *We are exhorted to walk by faith, not by sight* (2 Cor. v. 7.); *to set our affection on things above, not on things on the earth* (Coloss. iii. 2.); *to have our conversation in heaven.* (Phil. iii. 20.) Temporal good things make but the least part of the Christian's portion, and therefore deserve the least part of his care. It is the good Christian's character to *look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen* (2 Cor. iv. 18.): always bearing in mind this immense difference between them, that *the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.* But,

Secondly, We must not start aside from our duty on account of any failure in the temporal rewards of it.

This caution, difficult as it may be to those who have hope in the present life only, must methinks be easy to those whose views are principally directed to a far better. If we accustom ourselves to consider the advantages of this world only as secondary incitements to godliness, and such as are not worthy to be compared with that primary one, the happiness reserved for us in heaven, we can hardly be

affrighted from our duty by any circumstances that may attend us here; because we can never be sure but that those circumstances may contribute to the success of our main pursuit: nay, we may always be assured, that, by good management, the most afflictive circumstances may be made to work together to our highest good. The delay of our harvest, for a little while at most, will not make us *weary in well-doing* (Gal. vi. 9.), so long as we rest assured, that, in due season, we shall reap what is infinitely more worthy of our pains, if we faint not. On the other hand,

Thirdly, Let us beware of growing fond of this world by reason of any successes we may be blessed with in it.

If riches increase, set not your heart upon them (Psal. lxii. 10.), saith the Psalmist. This is a piece of advice, which he inculcates with some earnestness; well knowing its importance in itself, as also the great need men have to be reminded of it. Love of this world is indeed a temptation, to which the prosperous part of mankind are exceedingly exposed. Whilst men's circumstances are narrow, or their accommodations but moderate, they can preserve a proportionable indifference to such matters, and will probably sit as loose to the world as it does to them. But its smiles and embraces are not so easily resisted. When, by the blessing of Providence, *the lot is fallen to us in a fair ground, and we have a godly heritage* (Psal. xvi. 6.); we grow pleased and satisfied with *having our portion in this life: we count ourselves happy men* (Psal. xvii. 14.), and promise plenty and enjoyment to our souls for many years (Psal. xlix. 18.); not considering, in the meanwhile, that we are but *strangers and pilgrims on this earth*; and that, by despising or undervaluing, we shall certainly forfeit, what alone deserves to be called, our birthright.

Lastly: From the whole of what has been said, let us draw this important conclusion, "That the success of all our endeavours, in regard to this world as well as the next, depends ultimately on the good providence of God."

Let this saying, then, sink down into your ears (Luke, ix. 44.), and have its due effect upon your lives and conversations. In consequence hereof, before entering on any undertaking, at least any undertaking

of moment, take time to ask yourselves some such plain question as this : Is the affair in which I am engaging so circumstanced, as that I may reasonably hope for God's blessing to accompany me in the prosecution of it ? If, upon an honest inquiry into this particular, you will find all right, you may then proceed with cheerfulness, relying either upon the success of your present design, or upon something still more convenient for you. But, if your heart condemn you, resolve instantly to draw back, assuring yourselves, that *there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel, against the Lord.* (Prov. xxi. 30.) Be your schemes, humanly speaking, never so well laid, yet, without the concurrence of a superior power, you may depend upon it, they will come to nothing. You may, in particular, form friendly societies, in order to secure yourselves and your families from the decays of trade and the approaches of poverty ; and, so long as by fearing God and keeping his commandments, and bringing up your families in the same religious manner, you engage his patronage and friendship, you will deserve commendation, and every benevolent man will wish you good luck in the name of the Lord. But should you neglect to *set God always before you*, or to secure his blessing to your affairs, by constantly attending his worship, public and private, and *doing those things that are pleasing in his sight* ; in short, by the uniform practice of social virtues and religious duties, of *godliness and honesty*, you are virtually counteracting the designs of his providence, and may be assured your associations will end accordingly. *Though band join in band, the wicked shall not be finally unpunished.* Ungodly men may please themselves with their promising beginnings, and be flushed with the hopes of a successful exit. But Infinite Wisdom hath innumerable ways of defeating their best-concerted projects, or even of conveying a curse under the present seeming success of them. *I have seen the ungodly in great power* (says the Psalmist), *and flourishing like a green bay-tree.* (Psalm xxxvii. 36.) But what follows ? *I went by, and (lo !) he was gone : I sought him ; but his place could no-where be found.* (Ibid. 37.) I cannot leave with you any conclusion more apposite than his advice immediately following : *Keep innocency, and take heed unto the thing that is right : for*

that shall bring a man peace at the last. (Ibid. 38.)

S E R M O N III.

The Pleasantness of a Good Life.

PROVERBS, iii. 17.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness.

THAT virtue is sufficiently recommended to our choice by her own native charms, abstracted from every consideration of advantage to ourselves, is a notion, which may probably gain an easy assent with us, as it compliments us with a generosity which we are very apt to affect ; and especially as it soothes us with a piece of flattery, that of our self-sufficiency, to the belief of which we lie exceedingly open. But experience soon gives a check to our ill-supported ambition : it brings us down from those heights which we vainly assume to ourselves ; and forces us to own, to the mortification of our pride, that such maxims are by no means adapted to our nature or circumstances. Happiness we all eagerly and incessantly pursue : this is the mark, to which our aims are, and (while our nature continues) will be, at least principally, directed ; and, therefore, we may be sure, no proposals can be rightly calculated for us, where the consideration of happiness is left out or neglected.

Accordingly we find the inspired writers, in the best and most consistent scheme of morality that ever was offered to mankind, generally proceeding upon other principles, than such as that first above-mentioned, in their recommendations of virtue. Instances of what is here observed need not be enumerated : especially, since we have so very eminent an one in the well-known passage now before us.—The wise king Solomon is here, as in several other places, recommending the choice and pursuit of wisdom : by which he means, not a merely speculative acquaintance with the natures and properties of things, but a well-formed judgment about the measures of action, discovering itself in a suitable conduct ; in other words, a right understanding and regular practice of all the several duties and offices of life. This wisdom he recommends from the most generally engaging

gaging motive, the happiness attending it; *happy is he that findeth wisdom, the man that getteth understanding* (verse 13.); and to make his recommendation still more successful, he introduces wisdom as an exalted personage, holding forth to her votaries advantages of various kinds, those of body in one hand, and those of fortune in the other: *length of days is in her right-hand, and in her left-hand riches and honour.* (Verse 16.) One thing, however was still wanting, and that so material an one, that, as the forementioned advantages could not of themselves furnish it, so neither could they make men happy without it. To complete all, therefore, this also is superadded; for the sublime description goes on in the words of my text, *her ways are ways of pleasantness.* (Verse 17.)

The words, thus explained, naturally lead me to recommend to your choice a life of virtue and piety, particularly from the consideration of the pleasures attending it.

“A bold undertaking this!” will the sensualist be ready to say, “and something like that of reconciling contradictions; for what else is it to pretend, that a life of religion is a life of pleasantness? Religion, which seems rather calculated to rob us of those enjoyments we already have, than to furnish us with any additional ones; which finds us placed in the midst of sensible objects, and continually solicited by them, and restrains us from the participation of them by a severe interdict? which engages us in a perpetual war with our inclinations and appetites, expressly enjoining us to deny ourselves, and to mortify our affections? And can you, after all this, pretend that the practice of virtue and religion is the way to pleasure? Might you not as well tell us, that we may please ourselves at the same time that we are denying ourselves; that we may gratify our inclinations even whilst we are mortifying them: that is, that we may both please and displease ourselves at the same time?”

Now, in answer to all this, there being in the foregoing allegations, as in most other objections, some truth mixed with much falsehood, I shall endeavour,

I. To explain the real import of the assertion in my text, and to guard against all groundless expectations from it.

II. To illustrate more directly its truth,

when rightly understood, by shewing that the ways of virtue are, in the justest sense, *ways of pleasantness.*

First, then, with regard to the real import of the assertion before us, and what it is that we undertake to prove in confirmation of it, we freely admit, that wisdom, or the practice of virtue and holiness, may be far enough from being pleasant or delightful to our degenerate nature; especially if still farther corrupted by ill example or ill company; at least till it is rectified by a good education, assisted by the grace of God. And accordingly, we are very ready to own, that there are gratifications, called by the name of pleasures, which religious wisdom is by no means qualified to procure for us. Gratification is a relative thing, depending not absolutely on the outward objects themselves, but on their suitability to the faculties employed about them. Very different objects, therefore, will be agreeable or pleasing to different persons, according as their faculties or tastes are variously disposed; and variously those will always be disposed, so long as men shall continue to be free and accountable creatures. Now, we are far from undertaking to prove, that virtue and piety shall be of so flexible a nature as to adapt themselves to every taste, how vitiated or depraved soever. For instance, to the glutton and the drunkard, to the lascivious and the prophane, we dare give no encouragement: the impertinent tale-bearer and retailer of scandal must *study to be quiet, and to do his own business* (1 Thess. iv. 11.); and the envious and malicious, the furious and revengeful, must *put off the old man* (Eph. iv. 22.), must divest themselves of their savage and diabolical temper, before they must expect that the ways of religion shall be *to them ways of pleasantness.* Whilst these persons retain the same appetites, the same relish, they now have, we do not pretend that godliness hath any pleasure for them: so far from this, that we freely declare to them, their gratifications are such, that religious wisdom will not allow of, cannot consist with them. Thus far we are agreed. But then we must have leave to dissent from these persons, if they make this concession of ours any real objection against the pleasantness of a virtuous and godly life.

For, in the first place, the entertain-

ments

ments just hinted at, and such like, from which religion debars us, are not the proper gratifications of man, nor would they be at all agreeable to him, were his relish kept in its genuine state, and such as is suitable to the original dignity of his nature. The inclinations *which are from above* (Jam. iii.); which were at first implanted in man by his wise Creator, and are still cherished by the gracious influences of the *Holy Spirit*, are first pure, then peaceable. (Jam. iii. 14. 19.) Whereas, the gratifications we are speaking of are adapted only to such a taste as is earthly, sensual, devilish. (Ibid. 17.) So far, therefore, as any person is capable of pleasure from such objects or employments as these, so far is he degenerated from what he originally was, and still ought to be; so far he sinks into a state of brutality, or is even transformed into a fiend of darkness. Now, in our recommendations of virtue and godliness, we are supposed to address ourselves to reasonable creatures, to men: and if men, by a wilful abuse of their natural faculties, shall have lost all relish for such gratifications as are properly human, such as are adapted to the superior, the immortal part of their nature; if they leave themselves no taste for any entertainments but such as debase their composition, are the reproach of their understandings, and of which it would be too favourable an account to say only, that they degrade them to a level with the beasts that perish; and if, after all this, they find themselves obliged to say of the paths of wisdom and virtue, that *they have no pleasure in them*: can there be any difficulty in perceiving where the fault really lies? or, can an objection of this sort come with any tolerable grace from a being, whose privilege and boast is the faculty of reason?

Besides: what if, after all, the gratifications, from which religious wisdom debars us, should be found rather to usurp the name, than to answer the character of real pleasures? and yet a little reflection, or however a very little experience, may convince us that this is in fact the case: the same thing that makes us laugh, may be far enough from making us happy. True pleasure, as well as real grief, is generally a sedate, silent, thing: or, however, as far as happiness is concerned in it, it must imply something of duration and permanence; it must be esti-

mated, not barely from the beginning, but from the progress, and especially from the conclusion and consequences, of an entertainment: and, in truth, that entertainment alone should be placed to the account of pleasure, which shall be found to have had an over-balance at least of satisfaction attending it. Now, which, among the great variety of criminal gratifications, can abide this test? Those of riot and excess are manifestly condemned by it: the joy, such as it is, accompanying them, can at best endure *but for the night*, and then *heaviness* literally cometh in the morning. (Psal. xxx. 5.) As to gratifications of the malevolent kind; pain and uneasiness must surely be an equally inseparable attendant upon them. An ill-natured jest, or a piece of scandal, may perhaps unaccountably divert us for a while, so far as to produce a fit of noisy and seemingly real mirth: but let a person of humanity consult his own breast on such occasions: let him ask, whether there is that calmness within, which should be an essential ingredient in true pleasure; or, rather, whether, in the midst of such *laughter*, the heart be not sorrowful; and, however, whether *the end of that mirth* be not constantly *heaviness*? (Prov. xiv. 13.) Nay, as to those gay scenes of vanity, which in the present refined age have almost engrossed the title of entertainments, these also must, I presume, soon cease to be agreeable, when they cease to be innocent. Indeed, when they are most innocent, that is, when they are made use of to fill up the vacancies (if any such there really can be), to relieve the toils, and to suspend the troubles, of life; the very names they are distinguished by, of amusements or diversions, intimate plainly enough, that a short refuge only, and not any real enjoyment, is expected from them. But when they are allowed to occupy large portions of time, and are made (as, I fear, they too often are made) the principal business of life, they must surely oppress, instead of recreating the spirits, and become as inconsistent with the satisfaction as they are with the duty of a rational being. Or, if perhaps in youthful years, while the spirits are fresh, life should pass away with no considerable interruption, in a pleasing round of thoughtless gaiety; yet let us be assured, this expedient will not serve our purpose throughout. Could a man live many such years,

years, and rejoice in them all; yet days of darkness will come (Eccles. xi. 8.), when a mind unfurnished with useful knowledge and virtuous habits, shall find cause enough to accommodate the Prophet's complaint to its own feelings, *My leanness, my leanness: woe unto me! the treacherous dealers* (Isai. xxiv. 16.), those vain amusements that have wasted the best part of my life, and left me no equivalent for my choicest moments, *have dealt treacherously with me: yea these treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously.*

Upon the whole, I doubt not but the same judgment may be made of all the other kinds of criminal indulgence: namely, that they are, either in themselves, or in their consequences even in this world, as inconsistent with true and lasting pleasure, as they are with innocence. Religion, ordinarily at least, denies us no gratifications, but such as are either in the very enjoyment accompanied with pain, or sure to be closely followed by it: and is, therefore, to be looked on by us, not as the enemy, but as the guardian, of our pleasures.

Our blessed Lord, it is true, does enjoin us to *deny ourselves* (Mark, viii. 34.); and the injunction, though perhaps most eminently relating to his first disciples and followers, yet must by no means be understood as peculiarly confined to them. But, besides that our Saviour has surely done more than enough for us to reconcile us to this seemingly hard saying, and even to make us cheerfully take up our cross, when we cannot otherwise follow him, if we attend to the real import of the duty, so far as it is of general obligation, we shall find nothing in it so very unfavourable to true pleasure, as we might at first imagine. To deny ourselves, is not to deny the whole of our being; that is impracticable: nor is it to deny the most excellent part of it; that is at least unnecessary. It is only to deny our *car-nal appetites*, those *fleshy lusts which war against the soul* (1 Pet. ii. 11.), or if at any time it respect our understandings, we are only to deny the pride and arrogance, not the sober dictates or the rational entertainments of them. The term, self, is here taken in its most confined, indeed its most improper, sense; for a part only, and that the least valuable, the worst part of us. And, in this sense, we may, we must, deny ourselves, and please

ourselves at the same time; that is, we must deny the inferior, and please the superior, part of our composition; we must mortify our inordinate affections, and gratify our reason and conscience; we must strive against *the law in our members*, and be subject to the *law of our minds*. (Rom. vii. 23.) A contradiction, indeed, this may be to flesh and blood; but to the distinguishing faculty of human nature, it is most agreeable; and should, therefore, one would think, be the pleasure, and must certainly be the proper happiness, of man.

Not that, after all, we need be under any such dreadful apprehensions, that at our entrance upon a life of virtue and religion we must take a final leave of all the pleasing objects of sense. That part of the objection therefore which proceeds upon supposition of any such interdict as this, is founded on a strange misapprehension, or an invidious misrepresentation, of the case. Man is a sensible as well as a reasonable being: and though the pleasures which religious wisdom procures for us be chiefly of the latter sort, yet is she far from denying us all gratifications of the former kind, or indeed ordinarily any but such as are some way or other destructive of themselves. Nay, if the man of pleasure will vouchsafe to hear us, we dare venture to assure him, that, in several very considerable respects, the man that conducts his pleasures by the rules of religion shall have the advantage of the man that transgresses these boundaries, even in the gratifications of sense, besides the many far superior ones which the former enjoys, whilst the latter knows nothing of them. I now proceed, as was proposed,

II. To illustrate more directly the assertion in my text, by proving that the *ways of virtue are*, to every well-disposed mind, *ways of pleasantness*.

Pleasure and enjoyment must be the result of the presence of some agreeable object to its correspondent faculty: and if so, then where either object or faculty is wanting, enjoyment must be wanting too. But, now, does not a vicious and intemperate use of what is called pleasure tend naturally to destroy its own objects, by destroying that substance which alone can supply them? And, accordingly, how often do we observe those who have riotously gorged themselves with the super-

superfluities, thereby reduced to a want of even the necessities, of life. Or, supposing a continued course of vicious indulgencies should leave the objects of pleasure in sufficient quantity and perfection; is it not, however, of the nature of excess to impair the faculties? In fact, they who exceed the bounds prescribed by reason and religion, leave true pleasure behind them. Excessive pleasure is, if I may so speak, its own executioner; and, by *faring sumptuously every day*, men generally very soon put it out of their power ever to fare agreeably. Whereas, the moderation, which wisdom and virtue require, preserves both the materials of pleasure and our relish for them. The good man (other circumstances being supposed equal) can command some agreeable entertainment whenever he sees fit; and, when he hath done so, can always enjoy it.

Enjoy it he can (which is a farther great advantage) pure and unmixed with any such bitterness as unbridled passion is continually pouring into the cup of an immoral, irreligious man, notwithstanding all the pleasing ingredients and opportunities for tasting them that this world can afford him. One would have thought that the same temper which could make Haman boast of his wealth and grandeur, domestic felicity and court-favour, might have rendered him contented and pleased, if not happy, with it: yet, if we will take his own word, the case was quite otherwise: *All this, says he, availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.* (Esth. v. 13.) Thus again: Where was the happiness of Ahab, with all the delights of a king of Israel at his command, when, upon Naboth's refusal of his vineyard, *he came home heavy and displeased, and laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread?* (Kings, xxi. 4.) The truth is, religion alone can secure a man from the painful effects of his own passions: where this is wanting, it is in the power of every body about him to ruffle his temper and interrupt his enjoyments: he cannot continue a day in such a world as this is, without having his envy alarmed, his pride mortified, his selfish views thwarted, or his resentment provoked, by something or other that comes in his way: hence his mind is tossed about from one tormenting

passion to another, nay, often distracted by contrary passions at the same time. Whereas a good man shall be satisfied from himself: by the aid of divine grace and the comforts of religion, his satisfaction is placed beyond the reach of external casualties. This divine philosophy does not indeed pretend to extirpate the passions; but, by rectifying their disorders and regulating their motions, it renders them even friendly to happiness. And, accordingly, whilst *the wicked are as the troubled sea when it cannot rest; great peace have they who love God's law, and nothing shall offend them.*

Let us, however, suppose something of this kind to be the case also with an ungodly man; let us suppose him so perfectly acquainted with the secrets of luxury, as not only to make his faculties and their objects keep pace with each other, but to keep every disquieting passion at a due distance: yet, whilst he lives *without God in this world* (Eph. ii. 10.), whilst he *feeds himself without fear* (Jude, xii.) of his providence or sense of his presence, the best part of every enjoyment is lost to him, and quite escapes his perception. And, accordingly, how natural and how common is it for such persons, after having long repeated the same dull round, to grow peevish and splenetic, and sick of such insipid courses, and how frequently do we find them at last with the utmost disgust pronouncing every earthly delight to be *vanity and vexation of spirit*; nay sometimes putting a voluntary period to a life so comfortable, without waiting for their appointed dismissal from it! Whereas, the good man, he who lives under a prevailing sense of a superintending Providence, by enlarging his views, ennobles every satisfaction. He perceives an additional sweetness in every gratification resulting from the consideration that *it is the gift of God* (Eccl. iii. 13.); and by this means improves each of his pleasures into an opportunity of experiencing, *how joyful and pleasant a thing it is to be thankful.* (Psal. cxlvii. 1.) So far is religion from being an enemy to our joys, that it chastens and refines, and so in reality heightens and exalts, them.

But farther: Is freedom from foreboding cares and anxious misgivings necessary to a comfortable enjoyment of the good things of this life? And where shall

shall we seek for this but in the ways of godliness? If the atheist, who has no hope of any invisible protection, must naturally, and may reasonably, be under continual apprehensions of some or all of those evils, to which the weak and precarious condition of his being every moment exposes him; what must the case of that man be, who is in regard to all the purposes of guidance or comfort as much without God, though not without the belief of him! how must he tremble who only believes! believes there is a Being, actuated by impartial justice and armed with uncontrollable power; whom at the same time he finds himself obliged to consider as his irreconcilable enemy! how must he be *afraid even* (if that could be supposed) *where no fear is* (Psal. liii. 5.), of having (what he calls) his pleasures torn from him, or himself from them! and what relish can he well have for any enjoyment under such circumstances! Whereas, the man who is conscious, that by the practice of virtue and holiness he secures the protection and friendship of that Being, who governs and conducts all events, has a solid foundation for confidence and security, and *needs not fear what man, or any created being, can do unto him*. He has engaged that Almighty Power on his behalf, whom all nature obeys; who can turn even disappointments into blessings, and make *all things work together for his good* (Rom. viii. 28.): to him he can securely trust the issue of all his endeavours; to him he can unbosom all his desires; he can *pour out his heart before him* (Psal. lxii. 8.); *casting all his care upon him, who* (he is well assured) *careth for him*. (1 Pet. v. 7.)

Virtue is, in truth, the source of all rational and manly delight: it is (as it has well been called) "the health of the soul, without which none of its satisfactions can be found or sincere." The mind of man when under the dominion, and wounded with the consciousness of sin, *is in pain and travaileth*. The sensualist may employ his thoughts and care in *providing for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof* (Rom. xiii. 14.): but without religion no provision can be made for the superior part of man's being: without this there must unavoidably be an emptiness and (in the Psalmist's expression) *a leanness in the soul* (Psal. cvi. 15.);

which can by no means receive nourishment from merely sensual repasts, much less from criminal gratifications. And can the pleasure of the man be in any degree complete, whilst the mind is wholly unprovided for! Whilst lust and appetite are (as it were) upon the throne, the constitution within us is in an unnatural, and must therefore needs be in an uneasy and disordered state. The rational soul is an active principle: conscious of its native pre-eminence, it will not fail to make continual remonstrances against the usurpers of its just prerogative; or if it does not, we may conclude it to be in a fever or a lethargy: diseases so much more dreadful than those we commonly call by these names, as they threaten us in an infinitely more important and lasting concern.

To what has been said of virtue and godliness in general, I might add the mention of several particular virtues and graces, the single exercise whereof is exquisitely pleasant and delightful; and the regular succession of which in the good Christian's life is sufficient to make him *rejoice evermore*. (1 Theff. v. 16.) I might enlarge upon the exercise of gratitude to the Fountain of all good; that of contemplation on his adorable perfections; that of universal love to mankind, and Christian charity to our brethren; that of relieving the distressed, *comforting the feeble-minded, supporting the weak*; in short, diffusing happiness, and doing all the good offices in a man's power, to the bodies and souls of all around him; conscious, every moment, how incomparably *more blessed it is to give than to receive*: I might (as the pious Psalmist has done before me) bid you *mark the perfect man and behold the upright*; and see how all the paths, and especially how *the end, of that man, is peace*! (Psal. xxxvii. 37.) Above all, I might insist on that glorious prospect of future bliss which faith presents to our view, and on which the good Christian's hope may continually dwell. But I forbear.—Those who are already acquainted with the ways of godliness, know that its pleasures are not to be described: and as to those who are not, we can only assure them, they will not, at least after the first struggles and reluctances of their conversion are over, they will not repent of having made the experiment.

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Upon the whole : Pleasure is a relative thing ; depending on the taste and relish of the person that receives, as well as on the object or action that occasions it : and, accordingly, to men of different tastes, different objects will be agreeable ; nor is it here denied, but that vicious actions may be, and in many instances are, attended with pleasing sensations. It could not indeed well be otherwise in a state of trial. But then, what we say and insist on, is this :—the pleasures of a religious life are manly, sober, substantial, lasting ; those of sin are brutal, noisy, transient : the former are always growing upon experience ; the latter are generally blasted and destroyed by it : the former are the result of a due exercise, a proper disposition of both sensitive and intellectual powers ; the latter of a misapplication and abuse of those, and utter inactivity of these : the former result from the health of the mind ; the latter are either the causes or the effects of a diseased and dangerous habit of it. But the most important difference of all is, that the pleasures of sin, if not timely exchanged for grievous repentance and remorse here, will certainly be succeeded by something far more dreadful hereafter : whereas those pure streams of delight which flow from godliness, shall at our departure hence be rather improved than altered ; shall open into new and inconceivable scenes of joy at God's right-hand, and swell into rivers of pleasure for evermore. (Psal. xvi. 11.)

How favourably is this our state of probation ordered ; wherein our present happiness is not only made consistent with our duty but inseparably united to it ? What thanks ought we to render to that gracious Being, who has made our enjoyment of the most solid satisfactions which this world affords, a preparative for the fruition of those unspeakable joys which he has prepared for us in a far better ! • How inexcutable shall we be, if we sacrifice our ease and truest comfort here in order to make ourselves miserable for ever !

I shall conclude with the affecting invitation of the prophet Isaiah, which you will easily apply with me to the present subject, and imagine to be the words of Wisdom herself : *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters ; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat ;*

yea come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread ? and your labour for that which satisfieth not ? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear and come unto me ; hear and your soul shall live ; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you (Isai. lv. 1, 2, 3.) ; and the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever. (Isai. xxxii. 17.)

S E R M O N IV.

The Honourableness of a good Life.

PROVERBS, iv. 8.

Exalt her, and she shall promote thee : she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her.

THESE words are part of an exhortation or instruction, which the wisest of men informs us he had himself received from his illustrious, and then aged and experienced, father : a circumstance which, could we urge no higher consideration, must needs, of itself, recommend the advice and encouragement contained in them, to our especial attention and observance.

Now the antecedent, to which the words before us refer, is wisdom : by which (I conceive) we are here, and indeed generally in other passages of this book, to understand, not barely an accurate knowledge of things (though that is, no doubt, very ornamental and useful), but discretion in ordering one's conduct and behaviour ; more especially that branch of it, which discovers itself in the choice of the noblest end, and the pursuit of that end by the fittest means : in other words, that wisdom, which hath its beginning in the fear of God, and the good understanding whereof appears in a life conducted by the rules of virtue and religion. To exalt and embrace this wisdom, is to make it the principal object of our esteem and desires ; to prefer it to all the other seeming advantages of this world ; and, in course, freely to renounce them, and to quit the pursuit of them, whensoever they stand in competition with it, or would draw us aside

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from it. The inducement here made use of, addresseth itself to one of the most generous principles in our nature; proposing to us a reward, which is of all the merely temporal blessings annexed to a good life, the most noble and excellent: *Exalt Wisdom, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her.* (Eccl. vii. 1.)

In order then to enforce the advice in my text, and to recommend the practice of virtue and religion to the choice of every generous mind, I shall endeavour to illustrate the connection that is here affirmed to be between virtue and honour, and to shew that the practice of the former is the surest method that can be taken for the attainment of the latter.

With this view I propose, first, to state in a few words the meaning of the assertion here advanced: secondly, to confirm more fully the truth of it: and, thirdly, to deduce some proper and useful inferences from it.

First, then: In order to prevent any mistake in men's apprehensions of this matter, and (in consequence of such mistake) any error in their pursuits, or disappointment of their expectations; let it be observed, that by honour we do not here mean that fame or vain glory which consists in the acclamations of the populace, and the applauses of the multitude. These must often be courted by such methods as a good man cannot, and therefore a wise or great man will not stoop to the use of. Accordingly we are justly cautioned against being *desirous* of this kind of glory (Gal. v. 26.); and our Lord himself hath intimated, that we are never more in danger than *when all men speak well of us.* (Luk. vi. 26.) The arts of popularity are indeed generally inconsistent with the precepts of virtue and religion. Too tender a sensibility and *fearfulness of the reproaches of men* (Isai. li. 7.) must, in such a world as this is, continually betray us into unwarrantable compliances. They who *love the praise of men more than the praise of God* (Joh. xii. 43.), must be prepared to desert any unfashionable truth or duty, and to fall in with any follies or vices which the customs of a degenerate age shall recommend to them. Such fame or glory then cannot, we may be sure, be the same with that honour which the text encourages us to promise to those, that exalt

and embrace religious wisdom. To proceed, then:

Honour is a term of large extent, being used in several different senses. But as far as we are here concerned with it; as it makes up an article in men's account of temporal good, and may be considered as one of the present rewards of virtue and piety; its significations may be reduced to these two, dignity and reputation: where, by dignity we may understand the favour of princes, and offices of trust and titles of honour consequent thereupon; and by reputation, the esteem of mankind in general, especially the valuable part of them, and that commendation and good name which are consequent upon it. And to both these kinds of honour, at least so far as either of them is truly desirable, I doubt not but it may easily be made appear, that a life conducted by the rules of virtue and religion gives the only just pretensions, and such also as are most usually, though not infallibly, successful.

First, to begin with the former: No pretensions to promotion and dignity can be better supported than by godliness and integrity. God is the fountain from whence all true honour and authority must be derived; and none can regularly be advanced to a resemblance of him in either of these perfections, but those who antecedently resemble him in the other perfections of justice, wisdom, goodness, &c. on which they are founded. Nor does the case stand thus only upon the foot of right and reason, but also of prudence and good policy. For the interests of prince and people cannot surely be entrusted in safer hands than those of persons, whose loyalty and sacred regard to the one, and whose benevolence and fidelity to the other, are grounded on the firm basis of religion, and conducted under the fear of God. Every prudent as well as pious prince will make those well-known resolutions of king David, recorded in Psalm 101st, the patterns of his own. And, we may presume also, *when such righteous persons are in authority, the people will have the justest cause to rejoice.* (Prov. xxix. 2.)

We were indeed informed some years ago, among other choice secrets communicated to this enlightened age, that the vices of private persons have a beneficial influence upon the public welfare: and

and had the assertion been as clearly proved, as it was confidently proposed, some of the worst of men might (I suppose) have expected a proportionable share of the honours and promotions of the community, as being some of the most useful members of it. But, besides that assertions of this kind must suppose (what can never be granted) that Divine Providence hath no concern in the government of the world; if we consider this matter only according to the natural course of things, we need but desire you to imagine one state to be administered by such persons as Jethro recommended to Moses, *able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness* (Exod. xviii. 21.); and another to be governed by such magistrates as our blessed Lord represents as *neither fearing God nor regarding man*. (Luk. xviii. 2.) Do but imagine, I say, two states to be thus differently administered, and then tell us, which of the two is most likely to be prolonged, and which hath its honours most deservedly bestowed.

Righteousness, especially in persons of eminence and authority, *exalteth a nation*. (Prov. xiv. 34.) Men of piety have all the inducements to a regular exercise and beneficial use of the power they are possessed of that any other persons can possibly have; and, over and above, the still stronger tie of conscience, and the awakening consideration, that they must one day give an account of all their talents before the awful tribunal of the *King of kings*. And what should farther most powerfully recommend the services of such persons, is the blessing of Providence, which usually attends them in all that they put their hands unto, and causes whatsoever they do to prosper.

Accordingly, in every regular state of things, virtue and piety are the surest steps to promotion and advancement: *Seekest thou a man diligent in his business* (says a wise observer of men and things), *he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men*. (Prov. xxii. 29.) David himself had very remarkably experienced the success of the advice which he gives in my text; having been by Providence *taken away from the sheepfolds*, and at length *appointed to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance*. (Psal. lxxviii. 70, 71.) God has indeed, in general, declared, *that them that honour him, he will*

honour (1 Sam. ii. 30.): and, agreeably to this declaration, numerous are the instances, recorded in the sacred history, of the providential advancement of virtuous and religious men. But I need produce no other besides the well-known case of the patriarch Joseph: in the affecting narration whereof, you cannot miss of observing, how every step, taken to depress and ruin him, first by his envious brethren, and after by the disappointed and enraged wife of his master, contributed to his exaltation; till at last we find him *raised from the dungeon to the high dignity of governor over all the land of Egypt*. (Psal. cv. 17, 18, &c.)

It must indeed be owned, that cases of this sort are by no means constantly to be expected. The providence of God usually acts by the intervention of second causes, and agreeably to the tendencies which himself hath impressed upon them. Now, the man of virtue and piety, being satisfied from himself, or having nobler objects in view, may be less ready to improve favourable opportunities for his own advancement than either virtue or piety necessarily require him to be: and, it is no wonder, if where this is the case, he should often be overlooked in the distribution of honours, even by those who have very upright intentions in making it. But in a more corrupt state of affairs, which must sometimes happen, when bad men are permitted to bear rule, it is still less to be wondered at, if such men be inclined to postpone men of probity, and to draw up others after them of characters more like their own. And yet even here, recourse is generally had to some appearance of merit, where the reality is neglected. Nay, the very epithets, by which great men are distinguished, are derived from some eminent virtue or complication of virtues. So that, in short, where wicked men are promoted to eminence and power, their vices and impieties give the lie to their titles: and we may apply the declaration of our blessed Lord to this case also, *Verily, I say unto you, he that entereth not in by the door of real worth and usefulness, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber*. (Joh. x. 1.)

Secondly: But not to dwell longer upon this part of my subject, especially since honour of this kind can be the expectation of but few, and the possession of still

fewer, let us proceed to illustrate the tendency of virtue with regard to the other species of honour, which is, or ought to be, the concern of all men to secure; but which however we shall find to be the proper and the peculiar reward of the wise and good.

Reputation, in the very notion of it, implies something reputable, some real worth in the subject of it. It is the testimony which mankind are presumed to bear to merit, and to merit only. The applauses of mankind should be considered as one common fund for the encouragement of virtue and the reward of worthy undertakings; out of which every man should receive his portion in due season; but which should by no means be squandered away or misemployed. A good name without good qualities to support it, is such an incongruity in the moral world as no irregularity in the natural bears any analogy or resemblance to.

We are indeed commanded by an Apostle to *honour all men*. (1 Pet. ii. 17.) But if we take the precept in its most unlimited extent, it is plain from the nature of the thing that that honour which is to be paid to all men, cannot be the same with this which we are now considering; inasmuch as this, being proposed as a reward, evidently supposes in the person receiving it some superiority over, some preference to, others; whereas, what is given alike to all, cannot imply a preference of any. The precept, in truth, seems to require no more than this; that we should treat human nature with some degree of respect wheresoever we meet with it; that we should look upon every man's good name as his valuable property, and not wantonly disturb any one in the possession of it. But then men's reputations are not hereby declared to be unalienable properties, or such as no misdemeanor shall subject to a forfeiture. We are to hope well of every man till we find cause to the contrary; and to look upon all men, as such, as intitled to a respectful treatment. But in persons no more than in things are we allowed, much less required, to call evil good (Isai. v. 20.); or to give credit and commendation to those who neither have nor deserve to have any.

And as thus it ought to be in reason, so thus it is generally found to be in fact

and experience. A vicious man may be rich or powerful; but truly honoured he hardly can be. The good despise, or at the best pity, him; and the bad, were they disposed (as they rarely are), have scarce ever the hardness to appear in his defence, or however not in his commendation. The truth is, reputation sits so awkwardly upon an immoral man, that no commendation can give any real credit to him: it may expose such an owner, but cannot adorn him.

On the other hand, bad as the world is, it is generally very just to the upright in this respect. Besides the promise of God in favour of them that honour him, men's natural sentiments of good and evil are sufficient for the most part to ensure to every truly good man the esteem and commendation of those about him. A good man is a venerable, a great character. A steady uprightness, a conversation becoming the gospel of Christ, commands the veneration of all that come within the sphere of its activity, with an almost irresistible authority. Even after his departure hence, the memory of the just man shall be blessed, and his valuable qualities and worthy deeds shall be had in everlasting remembrance. *The righteous man is more excellent than his neighbour* (Prov. xii. 26.), even his enemies themselves being judges.

For, otherwise, whence comes it that those very persons who will not be at the trouble (as they are pleased to imagine it) of becoming really virtuous or godly, are content to take so much pains as they often do, to appear such? Is it not because they know very well, that reputation is the proper inheritance of virtue, even in the intention of the donors; and at the same time hope to come in for a share, by putting off the semblance of it instead of the reality? And what if such persons do sometimes succeed in their fraudulent attempt upon the good man's property; does this prove that any thing short of a real character of goodness is either in itself, or in the opinion of mankind, a just recommendation to honour and esteem? Nothing like it. Such instances prove only the shortness of human discernment, which cannot see the heart, nor always distinguish real worth from false pretences to it.

And yet, thus much may be said even in this case: that real virtue is not only

more honourable and even more easy method of attaining, but a far more safe method of preserving a fair character, than the counterfeit show of it. To be acting a part for a man's whole life must, methinks, be extremely difficult, if not impossible. Hypocrisy is violence, and nothing violent can naturally be lasting. The truth is, honour itself hath a tendency to strip men of their disguises, and to expose their tempers. *Man being in possession of honour hath generally less understanding* (Psal. xlix. 24.), less caution about him, than when only in pursuit of it: he has now committed the end of all his reservedness and slavery; and it is time surely to take a little freedom, to throw off the mask, and to act in his own proper character: and we need not doubt but there will always be eyes enough upon the man of reputation to make the discovery; always spirit, or malice, or envy, enough to proclaim it: and when this is done, the hypocrite's pretensions are at an end. Men will hardly suffer themselves to be imposed on twice by the same person. Nay, should he become a sincere convert to godliness, his conversion will only be thought a fresh attempt upon men's understandings, and will be placed to the same account with his former collusions. His infamy is for life; and generally the stain of it is deeper in proportion to the brightness of that reputation, of which he before was unjustly possessed.

But the honour attending upon a real character of virtue and piety is of a more lasting nature. A good man can always appear with his own natural face. His goodness, being unaffected, sits easy upon him; and he needs not, in every step he takes, be apprehensive lest his mask should drop off, and his foul visage be exposed to view. The mark he aims at is always the same: he has therefore no occasion to be perpetually shifting or doubling: a graceful evenness, a beautiful consistence, appears in his character, which on this account can scarce fail of conciliating the esteem and admiration of every judicious beholder. And (which is most considerable) if such a character should for a time be clouded and obscured by the misrepresentations of envious and malicious men, yet the good man's innocence soon clears up; *his righteousness shines forth as the light, and his just*

dealing as the noon-day. (Psal. xxxvii. 6.)

Be it, however, remembered, that I have here been representing only the usual and general tendency, not the constant and invariable course, of things. For, after all that has been said, we must expect to meet with some exceptions, even in this case also. It must be owned, that good men themselves are not always so careful to maintain the favourable opinion of others as they really should be: attending chiefly, or rather solely, to the approbation of their own consciences and of the great Searcher of hearts, they may unawares expose themselves to the censures of those about them, and by degrees suffer in their reputations: but, as neither virtue nor religion require any such indifference, whatever misunderstanding may be consequent thereupon, should be charged not to their godliness but to their indiscretion. And, what if the good man should sometimes, even on the account of his superior goodness, be misrepresented by the malicious, and (in consequence of that) defamed by the unwary, and so, either through mistake or design, evil-spoken of by all; it is plain, this is not to be ascribed to his virtue as such, but to the malice of some and the shortsightedness of others. Virtue, though it may be the real cause of some men's slanders, will never be publicly assigned as such. No slanderer ever yet was so hardy, or understood so very little of human nature, as to make any man's superior merit appear as an article in his accusation.

Upon the whole: The practice of virtue and piety gives the only just pretensions to honour and reputation; and is the most compendious and easy, and only not infallible road to it. Room there always will be for failures even in this particular, so long as all men are free, and among them some weak and others wicked. But thus much we can affirm, that when good men are disgraced and bad men honoured, generally speaking, the one are mistaken for the other. And it is certainly a sufficient proof of the beneficial tendency of virtue, that whenever it appears such, it cannot fail of honour; and that vice must first counterfeit its title before it can obtain its inheritance.

From what has occurred to us in the

foregoing reflections, it is obvious to infer,

First, The vanity of that notion which would represent all regard for reputation as unworthy of a wife, and unbecoming a good man.

Men's concern for the good opinion, and fondness for the applauses of those about them, no doubt, may be, and too often is, carried too far: they may eagerly pursue the praises of persons incapable of conferring any real honour; or they may desire the reputation of trivial accomplishments; or their desire of fame and popularity may exert itself in ways dishonourable and criminal: and in any of these or the like cases, regard to, especially solicitude about, the commendations of others, is irregular in itself, and highly dangerous to men's virtue. And if we thus please men, we shall not be the servants of Christ.

But surely the esteem of wise and good men must deserve no small regard; and the desire of it, when duly regulated, must be not only allowable but commendable. To say otherwise, must be to contradict the common sense of mankind, and the declared sentiments of the wisest men in all ages. Or, could any doubt remain about the reason of the thing, our blessed Lord has for us Christians fully decided this point. An ostentatious performance of private duties in order *to be seen* (Matt. vi. 1, &c.) and *admired of men* (Matt. xxiii. 3, 5.), he has indeed condemned. Not so in respect to duties of a public nature. There, says he, *Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your father who is in heaven.* (Matt. v. 16.) With the same view, St. Paul tells us, he was solicitous to *provide things honest* (2 Cor. viii. 21.), *καλὰ*, things of graceful appearance, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. And how greatly a virtuous principle must ever be assisted by a due regard to the esteem of others, he has sufficiently intimated in that well-known recommendation of *whatsoever things are lovely and of good report* (Phil. iv. 8.), and that beautiful exhortation, *if there be any praise to think on these things.* And this leads me to infer.

Secondly, The iniquity of misapplying this reward, by either withholding it from

good men, or conferring it on persons of a contrary character.

The Psalmist justly makes it one ingredient, in his upright man's character, that he *honoureth them that fear the Lord* (Psal. xv. 4.): and, with equal justice, *despisers of those that are good* (2 Tim. iii. 3.), are by St. Paul reckoned up among the most profligate of the human species. And, surely, there cannot well be conceived a more base and ungenerous turn of mind than that which exerts itself in defaming and calumniating good men really, though not professedly, on the very account of their being such. There is scarcely any practice against which so severe penalties are denounced in the inspired writings, or with so much frequency, as against slander and detraction in general. But, if we are enjoined, as we expressly are, *to speak evil of no man* (Tit. iii. 2.), i. e. not unjustly, or even unnecessarily, to asperse any man, or take from the reputation he is possessed of; surely, to speak evil of good men, and enviously or even wantonly to vilify worthy characters, must be exceeding sinful.

And yet, I know not, whether is more injurious to the cause of virtue, to deny *honour to whom honour is due* (Rom. xiii. 7.) in some instances, or to render honour in general scarce worth desiring or enjoying, by throwing down all inclosures about it, and leaving it in common. If this is not denying the good man his due, or in strictness depriving him of his property, it is however (which amounts to the same thing) quite reducing the price and destroying the worth of it. For nothing is plainer, than that praise and good report must cease to be valuable in proportion as they are indiscriminately bestowed. In short, commendations misplaced are not only injurious to virtue, but directly repugnant to his will, who has declared that *they who despise him shall be lightly esteemed* (1 Jam. ii. 30.): and we see the reasons of that generous resolution of Elihu, *I know not to give flattering titles; in so doing my Maker would soon take me away.* (Job, xxxii. 22.) To proceed: from the foregoing reflections it may not be improper, or without its use, to infer,

Thirdly, The danger of forfeiting, and the importance of preserving a fair character

ter when established; and the necessity of care and vigilance for that end.

It is an observation of the wise preacher highly deserving of every good man's attention, that, *as dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour; so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.* (Eccl. x. 1.) The truth is, whatever allowances, in our present state of imperfection and frailty, should in reason be made, very sparing ones will in fact generally be made for the failings, but especially the sins, of men eminent for virtue and piety: and, which renders such cases still more to be lamented, they are too often found not only to wound deeply the characters of persons otherwise excellent, but to prejudice the interests of virtue and piety itself. If the man after God's own heart is surprised into the heinous sins of adultery and murder, notwithstanding his repentance, he gives occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. (2 Sam. xii. 14.) If a man of Peter's zeal and seeming constancy is yet in the article of danger so weak as to deny and abjure his Master, the example is too powerful to be withstood by his brethren, nor must we wonder that *they all forsook him and fled.* (Matt. xxvi. 56.) From such unhappy instances, bad men receive joy and comfort in their vices, flattering themselves, that all pretences to piety in others are only solemn grimace and hypocrisy; and that, however appearances may be against them, they are not in reality worse men than their neighbours; whilst good men, however unwilling rashly to quit the favourable opinion they have entertained of others, are inwardly out of countenance and grieved at such occasions of reproach, perhaps ready to say in their haste, "*all men are liars;*" (Psal. cxvi. 11.) nay, strongly tempted to fall from their own steadfastness.

And, if such melancholy deviations from duty in men otherwise least chargeable with them, furnish matter of rejoicing to men of a contrary character, and matter of real concern and grief to all pious observers, how strongly should they recommend caution and circumspection to the best of men! how careful should men of superior reputation and established characters be, not to let their good be evil-spoken of, on account of any real

misconduct, or even (as far as can be avoided) any appearance of evil! and how constantly should every such person especially address the great Preventer of sin and Guardian of innocence, in the devout Psalmist's words, and according to their utmost latitude of application, *Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and keep the door of my lips. Oh, let me not be inclined to any evil thing: let me not be occupied in ungodly works with the men that work wickedness; lest I eat of such things as please them.* (Psal. cxli. 3, 4.) But I hasten to infer, what is most obviously suggested by all that has been said, namely,

Fourthly, and lastly, The right way to promotion and esteem, and the great prudence and propriety of directing your ambition accordingly.

Seekest thou great things then for thyself? art thou desirous of being advanced to a situation of eminence and dignity? or wouldest thou be promoted to great honour? *exalt Wisdom, and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honour when thou dost embrace her: she shall give to thine head an ornament of grace, and great glory shall she deliver to thee.* (Prov. iv. 8, 9.) It is true, these and the like expressions must be understood as declarative only of the natural and usual tendency, not of any necessary and never-failing effects of wisdom and godliness. For in this case also *the race is not always to the swift, nor favour to men of skill:* (Eccl. ix. 11.) nay, sometimes, the fear of the Lord and a steady adherence to his service may *keep men back from honour.* (Numb. xxiv. 11.) But it is nevertheless certain, that virtue and piety are the best preparatives for, the brightest ornaments of, an exalted station; and, in case of disappointment, the completest equivalents for the want of it. Without these, no station can be truly honourable; and with these, though you may not enjoy pompous titles or large revenues, yet (which is far more desirable) you will *possess your souls.* (Luke, xxi. 19.)

Or, is your ambition more contracted? content to move in a lower sphere, are you solicitous however (as most commendably you may) to preserve a fair and unblemished reputation? to be esteemed and well-spoken of while living, and mentioned with advantage by those that come after you? in this respect also, *wisdom, religious wisdom, is the principal*

thing; wherefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting, get understanding. (Prov. iv. 7.) In vain shall ye seek for honour, substantial and lasting honour, in any way but that of virtue and godliness. Other methods there may be of conciliating the acclamations of the unthinking many, and perhaps also of imposing upon the more discerning few: but, then such vain-glory (for reputation I cannot call it) is but a vapour that appeareth for a little time; and is, at its best estate, utterly unworthy of the solicitude of a rational being. *The honour which cometh from God* (John, v. 44.), valuable in itself, and valuable for its duration, must be fought for only, because it can only be found, in his service: and, *such honour have all his saints.* (Psal. cxlix. 9.)

To conclude: We are all of us in our passage through a vain transitory world; all profess to seek a better country, that is an heavenly; and our social natures render it very agreeable, nay our present circumstances make it on many accounts highly expedient for us, to enjoy the favour and good opinion of our fellow-travellers by the way: and, accordingly, divine Goodness has so ordered matters, that the same conduct which is made previously necessary to our arrival at the former, is in the mean while our most promising method for securing the latter. Let us however constantly bear in mind, that the present is but a very uncertain state of things; in which one way there is, and but one way, of guarding against disappointments, and ensuring our success; and that is, always to look forward to that important period, when *every man shall*, in exact proportion to his real deservings, *have praise of God.* (1 Cor. iv. 5.) An adulterous and sinful generation may at present so far prevail against the wise and good, as to get the reputations of persons, and even the very notions of things, misapplied and confounded. But there is a day approaching, when our characters shall be under consideration of an impartial, unerring Judge; whose declaration in our favour will do us infinitely more honour, than all the praises that the greatest among men can bestow. When the blessed Jesus shall come in his own glory and his Father's, and of the holy angels (Luke, ix. 26.); to be called forth and acknowledged by him in that august assembly, will be a distinction far

surpassing our present conceptions. If, consistently with our pretensions to this, we can recommend ourselves to the goodwill and esteem of our fellow-creatures here, all is well. Let us however take care, that our concern for any thing of this kind be an help and encouragement, not a snare or an hindrance, to us in this our principal pursuit. In a word; may our ambition then only know no bounds, when the honour it aspires after is infinitely valuable! May we on no account forfeit our pretensions to that most significant of all applauses, *Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.* (Matt. xxv. 22.)

SERMON V.

The Nature of Heavenly-Mindedness, and the Danger of some Habits repugnant to it.

COLOSSIANS, iii. 2.

Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

AMONG many important designs, which the revelation of the gospel is calculated to promote, the first propagators of it seem to have had none more constantly in view, than that recommended by the words here before us: a design, every way worthy of so gracious an institution; and (as I may venture to add) peculiar to it. The affections are confessedly the main springs of human action: the regulation of these, therefore, must be of principal concern in morality; and accordingly this is what the writers on that subject have all along professed to aim at, and pretended to have accomplished. But never was this excellent end so rationally aimed at, or so successfully accomplished, as under the gospel dispensation; which, by opening a new scene of things, hath discovered a new set of objects to the affections of mankind; and hath given them a direction as far superior to any that was ever prescribed by mere philosophy, as the heavens are higher than the earth.

“That the things on the earth, the possessions and the pleasures of this present world, are objects utterly incapable of satisfying the soul of man,” hath always been a truth obvious enough.

Thus

Thus far, therefore, many of the philosophers easily might, and did, go in their discoveries. But then, after they had withdrawn, I should rather say, attempted to withdraw, the affections of their disciples from things on the earth, they were at a loss for any thing substantial, whereon to fix them. One well-known sect among them, having sought some proper rest for the affections and found none, declared for an extirpation of the affections themselves. This, however, soon discovered itself to be a wild and impracticable scheme; the real sensations of the man constantly refuting the extravagant pretensions of the philosopher. Others dwelt, with much seeming rapture, upon the idea of wisdom and the native charms of virtue; as sufficient to engage the affections of all who should bring minds fitly disposed to this sublime contemplation. But then, where to find any number of minds thus disposed, was the difficulty; and, among such creatures as men, was soon perceived to be an insuperable one. And though others talked, and (to do them justice) sometimes acted, great things, upon a prospect of perpetuating their names, and (as they called it) living for ever, in the memories of succeeding ages; yet their fondness also seemed somewhat unaccountably placed upon a reward, the payment whereof was not to take place till they must in person be incapable of receiving it. Those, therefore, who were for a more popular and more practicable scheme of morality, made good or happiness (some of the best of them joining social good with private) the object of the affections. But all the while, they were got no farther, at least with any certainty, than this present world. "The things above," was a phrase, with which the heathen morality was little acquainted: and to set the affection upon them might have been called, at the first promulgation of the gospel, a new commandment. A commandment however it is of that importance, that, upon the observance or neglect of it, men's moral characters will always be found principally to depend. An affection for this world, an inordinate desire and pursuit of its good things, or an excessive fear of, and aversion to, its evils, is a principle into which all the follies, the vices, and the villanies men are guilty of, may be resolved: as on

the other hand, a serious attention and regard to the things above, can alone support a man in the uniform practice of virtue and godliness. When we behold a rational being hurried on from the commission of one sin to that of another, we may certainly conclude, his affection is misplaced; this earth has taken possession of his heart; and we must not wonder to find him falling so easy a prey to every temptation that offers him any share of its profits or its pleasures. But where the things above are firmly believed and duly attended to, the case is far otherwise. A reward inestimable in its value and endless in its duration, keeps the mind that contemplates it steadfast and unmoveable: other interests, if not wholly overlooked, are however always considered as subordinate to this; and so, in case of interference, made to give way to it. In short, the precept in my text is that which, among us Christians at least, makes the principal difference between a good and bad man; and, accordingly, the same Apostle who characterizes the former as *having his conversation in heaven* (Phil. iii. 20.), concludes and *sums up* one of the blackest descriptions of the latter that occurs in the New Testament, into this one article, that he *minds earthly things*. (Phil. iii. 18, 19.)

What is in my text meant by *things above*, will best be learned by looking back to the immediately foregoing verse. *If (says the Apostle) ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.* Which last words determine us to understand by *things above*, the things of another world, the joys of heaven, the pleasures at God's right hand: and, what is in the former verse called seeking them, is in this latter expressed by relishing or setting the affection upon them. By their *being risen with Christ*, some have understood the Apostle to express the happy change made in the condition of the Colossians, by their removal from a state of darkness, slavery, and corruption, into the glorious light and privileges of the gospel: a removal, which might indeed, with regard to the greatness of its consequences, be fitly enough expressed by life from the dead. But, I presume, we need not have recourse to any figurative interpretation in this place: the expression may be well understood, according

according to its most natural import, of that glorious resurrection to endless happiness, which all good Christians hope for in consequence of the resurrection of Christ their head; and which is, by that illustrious event, so fully assured to them, that the Apostle (by a beautiful anticipation) here speaks of it as of a fact already past, rather than as of something only expected: *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above—set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.*

The Apostle's reasoning, considered in this light, comes to this: "Seeing that, as Christ your head is already risen, ye also are in due time to be raised, from the grave, to partake of eternal life and glory with him at the right hand of God: seeing ye are, *by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, begotten again to a lively hope, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you* (Pet. i. 3, 4.): make these glorious prospects the constant object of your thoughts and contemplations. Let your views and your affections terminate there only, where you expect to find your highest good. Let all the powers both of body and soul be jointly exerted in the pursuit of that endless happiness, which your bodies and souls shall, after their separation, be re-united in order jointly to enjoy."

The precept before us, you see, here stands as an inference drawn from the doctrine of Christ's resurrection, and of our own consequent thereupon: and, as such, I presume, it needs no farther illustration of the form or manner of its deduction. Confining our reflections, therefore, chiefly to the matter of it, I shall at present make it my business,

I. First, To shew briefly, what is implied in the duty of seeking, or *setting our affection upon, things above.* And,

II. Secondly, To point out some habits and dispositions more particularly repugnant to it.

I. Now by *things above*, we are to understand the things of another world, the joys of heaven, the pleasures at God's right-hand: for so the Apostle himself explains the phrase in the immediately foregoing verse: and what he there calls *seeking the things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God*, he here expresses by relishing or setting the affection

upon them. The duty we are considering, then, can imply no less than a firm belief of the reality of such a state of happiness to good men; a lively sense of its moment and importance; and an earnest desire and hearty endeavour above all things to prepare and qualify ourselves for it.

That it is necessary in order to our *setting our affection on things above*, that we should be persuaded of the reality of their existence, is too plain to need any enlargement. But it is material to observe, that this persuasion must not be an idle notional belief only of a future state; such as, having collected it from a train of reasoning and arguments, we seem to entertain scarce for any other purpose, but in order to shew our acuteness in proving it. No; it must be such a belief as is quick and powerful; such as is constantly present with our minds; and, by being so, works itself into the very temper and constitution of them: such as shall have an influence upon our thoughts in some degree proportioned to the high importance of the great objects of it; and shall discover itself, on all proper occasions, in our words and actions also. This, and this only, is that faith which overcometh this world, and which is necessary to our regularly *setting our affection on the things of the other.*

Accordingly, the heavenly-minded man will disengage his attention (I do not say wholly, for that is impracticable, but) as much as his present situation will well permit, from the affairs of this life. The happiness of heaven is the great end of his journey; which though he may not be actually thinking of in every step he takes, yet he will be always making some progress towards it. This will never, for any considerable time, be out of his view, but will be the object on which his thoughts will delight to dwell.

From such a power over his mind as a constant remembrance of heaven and heavenly things must give them, their influence will naturally insinuate itself into his discourse. Not indeed so as to damp the innocent cheerfulness of conversation, by perpetually affecting to introduce a pharisaical sourness or doubtful disputations into it; but so as to season it occasionally with natural observations, calculated for the use of edifying and ministering

tering grace unto the hearers. He will not be ashamed to give an account, and (if need be) *a reason of the hope that is in him*, upon any pertinent occasion: *which hope he has as an anchor of his soul, sure and stedfast* (Heb. vi. 19); or as a spring which gives movement and direction to his several powers; though he may not be ostentatiously studious of disclosing it to every observer, nor even in every motion attend to it himself.

In short, a serious and affectionate regard to the things above, distinguishes his character, and animates his whole conduct. To this, all his actions have a general tendency, and the most considerable of them a particular reference. He takes his measures of the desirableness of things, and the prudence of undertakings, not from what he sees in this world, but from what he hopes for in the next: *he walks by faith, not by sight.* (2 Cor. v. 7.)

And, as all enjoyment must be the result of a due agreement between the object and the faculty, the man that would effectually prepare himself for the happiness of another state, must acquire such habits of soul here as will be necessary to give him a proper relish for that happiness: such are purity, charity, and the like; which will not only, by God's appointment, gain him admittance into heaven, but in some degree make him a meet partaker of the felicities of that place. He must contract an habitual liking for those exercises of contemplation and praise, which will be at once the employment and the reward of the saints in light.

And herein will he exercise himself: he will not look upon preparation for heaven as a concern by the way only, as a business to be discontinued and resumed, just as his other affairs, his visits, or his diversions, the employments of his calling, or even his, otherwise commendable, searches after knowledge, will permit; but he will make it the governing principle, the leading business, of his life; and such as is, in comparison with all others, but especially when any of them stands in competition with it, the one thing needful. Less than this will hardly come up to the character of heavenly-mindedness. But, if we *thus set our affection on things above*, we may humbly hope (through the merits of our Redeemer) we shall finally be blessed with the full fruition of them.

Thus much may, I hope, suffice to shew what is implied in the duty of *setting our affection on things above*: especially since the nature of the duty will be farther illustrated, by a view of some contrary qualities. I proceed, therefore, as was proposed,

II. Secondly, To point out some habits which are, in a peculiar manner, repugnant to the duty and temper I have hitherto been describing.

And the first which offers itself to our consideration, is (what we usually call) worldly-mindedness, or love of the possessions of the present world.

Let me not, however, be understood to include all care or concern for the things of this world, under the denomination of worldly-mindedness. Whilst ~~men~~ live in this world, it is not to be expected that they should live wholly above it. Holy Scripture itself constantly represents men's secular callings as the appointments of God, and our allotments to them as depending on his all-wise disposal. Our temporal concerns, therefore, may, nay ordinarily they must, be taken into our account of business; and to leave, or to neglect, our proper calling, would be to desert the post which God himself hath assigned us.

And, indeed, were mankind, especially in the years of youth, strength, and manhood, to employ their time and their thoughts almost wholly in contemplating heaven, and heavenly things, the business of this world must be at a stand, and universal want and wretchedness must ensue: a state which Providence can by no means be supposed to have ordained or intended for the world. And, as to particular persons, they must not be surprised, if, after having, even upon the most spiritual pretences, lost the proper season to provide for themselves and families, they should find *want coming upon them as an armed man*. A regard to another world never ordinarily requires, will seldom justify, men's sequestering themselves from the lawful employments of this: nor must those persons accuse Providence, or charge God foolishly in the decline of life, on account of their want of worldly advantages, who spent the time allowed for the innocent acquisition of them, in such services as he no where required at their hands.

In short, there is an allowable, a commendable,

mendable, a necessary, care for the affairs of this life; which he that neglects to take, complies not with the order of Providence, nor acts agreeably to the situation in which God hath placed him.

But then, *whatsoever is more than this cometh of evil*. When we begin (according to the Apostle's expression) to *love the world* (1 Joh. ii. 15.); to *mind earthly things* (Phil. iii. 19.); to *set our affections on things on the earth* (Col. iii. 2.): when we look upon this world's possessions as our highest good, and make the acquisition of them our principal pursuit: when our minds rest in the enjoyment of them, and as it were repose themselves upon them with complacency, and without looking out for their proper happiness beyond them: when, in short, the cares of this world are permitted and encouraged to intrude, not only into our solitudes and retirements, but into our devotions and religious contemplations, nay even to make many sacrilegious deductions from that weekly portion of our time, which was from the beginning consecrated to far higher and holier purposes: then we may conclude, we are worldly-minded: our concern for this earth manifestly interferes with our preparation for heaven; and we have contracted a *friendship with the world, which is enmity with God*. (Jam. iv. 4.)

Our Lord's caution to his disciples is very remarkable to this purpose; being delivered in such terms as at once express the nature and criminal degree of worldly-mindedness; its dangerous tendency in regard to our preparation for another state; and our great proneness to be overtaken by it: *Take heed, that your hearts be not over-charged with the cares of this life; and so that day come upon you unawares*. (Luk. xxi. 34.) An affection and fondness for this world is, indeed, in the nature of things, irreconcilable with a proper regard for the next. Our care and attention can no more admit of two supreme objects, than our adoration: nor can we in reason expect admittance into heaven hereafter, unless we have made it at least our chief concern here.

Let us carry our imaginations forward to that great period, when *this earth, with all the works that are therein, shall be burnt up*. (2 Pet. iii. 10.) Let us there imagine the wretch, whose affections had been wholly set upon it, to appear before

the awful tribunal, crying, "Lord, Lord!" and what more gracious answer can mercy itself be supposed to make him, than this?—"Son, remember, that thou in thy life-time receivest thy good things" (Luk. xvi. 25.); thine by option as well as possession; and, in thy life-time, when it was thine own choice to receive them! had the heaven thou now cravest been accounted *thy treasure*, then *thy heart* would of course *have been there also*. (Matt. vi. 25.) But, *as for thee, thy heart was but for thy covetousness* (Jer. xxii. 17.); *thy godliness was gain* (1 Tim. vi. 5.); and thy very prayers only so many meditations on *thy farms, and thy merchandize* (Matt. xx. 13, 14.), thy preferments or thy purchases! Didst thou not, therefore, in effect, agree with me for the things of that earth which is now past and gone? Wherefore, *I do thee no wrong* in continuing thy immortal nature, and yet making those things thy only portion.—*Take that thine is, and go thy way!*"

A sentence, how equitable soever, yet of itself sufficiently dreadful! Well may the disconsolate soul cry out, *Lord, to whom shall I go? Thou hast the words of eternal life*. (Joh. vi. 68.) Yet this is not all. To be banished for ever from his presence, in whose presence alone is fulness of joy, is but a part, but the privative part, of the prophane (and in Scripture estimation the idolatrous) (Col. iii. 5.) worldling's punishment. Such an one would now be glad to compound for annihilation itself. But even this refuge, shocking as it is to human nature, cannot be indulged him. God is jealous of his honour, and will not admit of any rival in our affection. He that loveth the creature more than the Creator, must expect to feel a vengeance worthy of incensed Omnipotence: whilst angels and saints applauding the just dispensations of Providence, shall cry out, *Lo, this is the man that took not God for his portion, but trusted unto the multitude of his riches!* (Psal. lii. 7.) Such will finally be the doom of every one that *layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God!* (Luk. xii. 21.)

A second habit, inconsistent with heavenly-mindedness, is voluptuousness, or an inordinate love of the sensual pleasures of this world.

I say, an inordinate love; because here, also, I would by no means be understood as condemning every allowance in pleasing sensations,

sensations, under the denomination of voluptuousness. Man is compounded of two distinct principles, spirit and body: of which his *spirit was breathed into him by God himself*; whilst his *body was formed out of the dust* whereon he treads. (Gen. ii. 7.)

His spiritual part is the principle of life and motion, the seat of understanding and will; and therefore manifestly intended to preside and govern; whilst his bodily part, of itself utterly inactive, as plainly appears intended for subservience and subjection: and, lastly, his body, at the dissolution of the union, is to *return to its native earth*, whilst his *spirit is to return to God who gave it*. (Eccl. xii. 7.) So long, then, as each of these constituents of man has its proper province assigned it, each a proportion of care allowed it, according to the dignity of its extraction, of its use, and of its end; so long the man acts agreeably to the order of his nature, and to the will of its great Author; and, if some higher attainments may be lacking to render him *perfect*, yet *he is not far from the kingdom of God*. (Matt. xix. 20, 21.)

However, though we may take a reasonable care of our bodies, we must not *make such provision for the flesh* as to enflame and *to fulfil the lusts thereof*. (Rom. xiii. 13.) The former is well-pleasing to that Holy Spirit, whose temples we are; but by the latter, we grieve him, and quench his gracious influences. I speak not only of the grosser acts of intemperance and debauchery, but of the habit of sensuality; which, though it should not break out into notorious acts of riot or lewdness, may not less successfully, because more uniformly, *war against the soul*. (1 Pet. ii. 11.) It sinks the soul into the most abject slavery, the most dangerous insensibility. It imperceptibly alienates the heart from God and goodness, and stupifies its relish for religious exercises, and heavenly contemplations: a state, surely, in which no wise servant would choose to be surprised by his Lord at his coming.

What St. Paul saith of *the widow that liveth in pleasure*, that *she is dead while she liveth* (1 Tim. v. 6.), is a short but just description of the wretched condition of every one, who gives himself up to the gratifications of sense: he is dead to all the valuable, all the tolerable, ends of living; dead as to any proper use of that part of his being by which alone man can

be said to live. The life of a plant or an animal, he may indeed be allowed to partake of; though even this kind of life he frequently destroys, and more frequently renders imperfect and miserable. But, where the vegetative and sensitive life is best of all taken care of by him, the rational, which is the life of the man, is shamefully neglected; and the spiritual, which is that of the Christian, is for the most part totally extinguished. And what a preparation must this be for *the society of the spirits of just men made perfect*; of *an innumerable company of angels*; of *Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant*; and of *God, the Judge of all*! (Heb. xii. 22, 23, 24.)

Believe it, my brethren, the kingdom of heaven can only be taken by such an holy violence, as the man of pleasure will hardly be at the pains of using for the attainment of it. Let us not imagine, that God will *cast this inestimable pearl before the lazy or the sensual* (Matt. vii. 6.); or confer *an inheritance among them that are sanctified*, upon those who are content to *sell their birth-right in it for a morsel of meat*. (Heb. xii. 16.) The truth is, heaven itself would yield no happiness to men of this taste. The pleasures at God's right-hand are of a quite different nature from any gratifications they are acquainted with. These are to be the ultimate happiness of man; and will therefore (we may be sure) be adapted to the superior, the immortal, part of his nature; they will be rational, intellectual, spiritual. But, alas! what relish can the sensualist have for rational, for intellectual, for spiritual, delights; a paradise like that of Mahomet might be agreeable to such a man's capacities: but *he that has in him the hope of a Christian*; he that expects to be *like Christ, when he shall appear, and to see him as he is*, must in this life *purify himself, even as he is pure*. (1 Joh. iii. 2, 3.) And, for like reasons,

Lastly, The habits and affections of envy, malice, revenge, &c. are utterly inconsistent with preparation for, and enjoyment of, the things above.

The opposition between these malevolent affections and heavenly-mindedness may not, perhaps, appear so direct and immediate as in the former instances; but will, upon inquiry, be found not the less real. The truth is, the predominancy of these is generally but the consequence of

our captivity to the former. It is our attachment to this world, our earnestness about its possessions, its pleasures, or its pre-eminencies, which magnifies every trifling damage done us, nay every little slight put upon us, into a grievous and unpardonable injury; and which gives a proportionable keenness to our resentments and continuance to our enmity. He, whose heart is affected with a just sense of the infinite disproportion there is between things above and things on the earth, will not easily be drawn into any great warmth, at least not into any lasting hatred, about any of the pursuits of this world. They only, who mind earthly things, will think it worth while to prosecute them at the expence of their own charity, and that of all around them.

And, as the malevolent affections are thus repugnant to heavenly-mindedness, considered as an habit here, so are they no less incompatible with it, considered as a qualification for the enjoyment of heaven hereafter. *The wisdom which is from above, and which must accompany us thither, is first pure, then peaceable.* (Jam. iii. 17.) For as heaven is a place of perfect joy and tranquillity, whatsoever affections would either give uneasiness to their particular owners, or disturbance to society, must, even upon a natural, as well as judicial, account, be excluded thence. A soul filled with envy, rancour, and revenge, at its departure hence, must therefore be a guest very improper to be admitted to that feast. Passions of this kind (if we may argue from the effects of them which we see at present) would not only furnish out an hell in the breast that harbours them, but would diffuse their baneful influence, and communicate their torment, to all about them.

And let no man vainly presume, he shall not for ever continue such, with regard to the disposition of his soul, as he is at his entrance upon another world. The same habits, the same inclinations and aversions (the same in kind, though not in degree) that we carry out of this world, we must for ever retain in the next. *He that is then filthy, will be filthy still* (Rev. xxii. 11.), and he that is envious will be envious still. The soul is a simple and uncompounded substance; and those habits which long custom has confirmed in it, become fixed and lasting, and as it were of the essence of it. Thus,

at least, some of the ablest reasoners among the Heathen, with great probability, argued: but, if any doubt could arise about the nature of the thing, Revelation has removed all uncertainty upon this head; by frequently representing, and always supposing, the present life to be our only time of trial for eternity: and, as to the particular point before us, St. Paul's declaration to the Galatians is decisive to our purpose; where, having reckoned up *hatred, variance, wrath, strife, envying, &c.* among the works of the flesh, he concludes with some vehemence, that *they who do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God.* (Gal. v. 20, 21.)

Were these considerations duly attended to, surely the monstrous practice of duelling could not be so fashionable in a Christian country, as (to our shame be it spoken) it seems to be growing in our own. Our Judge himself hath plainly told us, what must be the portion of the wicked servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find smiting his fellow-servants. (Matt. xxiv. 49.) Where then shall that servant appear, who wilfully runs the hazard, not only of being found by his Lord, but of anticipating his coming, and rushing into his presence in the same contentious, and even furious, state of mind? who deliberately adventures, either to dispatch his neighbour's soul, or to plunge his own (perhaps both), into a situation unchangeable, with all that rancour and thirst of blood upon it, with which the combatants may be supposed to engage on such shocking occasions? But I forbear: nor have I said thus much, as pronouncing any thing upon the dead, but as cautioning the living. And God grant, that no one here present may ever thus expose himself to that judgment without mercy, which awaits those that have shewed no mercy! (Jam. ii. 13.)

I have now gone through with the heads I at first proposed. Let us only, by way of conclusion, take a short review of what has been said, and see what use may be made of it. And,

First, Has it appeared that an inordinate love of this world's possessions is irreconcilable with a proper affection for things above? Let us possess our souls with a just sense of the vanity of every thing here on earth. To this end, let us (in the spiritual sense of the Prophet's exhortation), *arise and depart, as knowing that*

that *this is not our rest* (Mic. ii. 10.) : that is, let us frequently transfer our thoughts from the present unabiding, momentary, scene of things, and in our contemplations, lay hold on the hope of an enduring substance set before us. It is the presence of sensible and temporary good things which gives them all that advantage they appear to have over such as are spiritual and eternal. We are fond of those, because we are always conversant about them ; but we have no taste for these, because we allow ourselves to be perfect strangers to them. The former offer themselves to our view in their full magnitude and dimensions ; whilst the latter, by reason of their distance from sense, are either wholly over-looked, or seen under great disadvantages. But meditation, under the direction of faith, supplies the defects, and corrects the errors of sight ; it gives a kind of presence to those objects which are yet only in futurity, and calls the things that (as yet) are not, as though they were (Rom. iv. 17.) ; it places things temporal and things eternal on the same level, and at the same distance from us ; by this means enabling us to view them in their just proportions, and to take a more exact estimate of their comparative worth and pretensions to our regard. The consequence of which must be, that this world, in its best estate, will appear unworthy of any great concern from a being who has an object so much more valuable before him ; and will have no glory, scarce any place, in his thoughts, by reason of that glory which so infinitely excelleth. (2 Cor. iii. 10.)

Again : Is love of the pleasures, as well as of the possessions, of this world, so inconsistent as we have seen with an affection for, and enjoyment of, the things above ? This must strongly recommend to us that great Christian duty of self-denial. An uninterrupted course of sensual gratifications, though separately allowable ones, is too dangerous a trial of human virtue, and such as a wise man would hardly trust himself with. Our carnal appetites, ever since the fall, have a very forcible tendency to evil : they rise in their demands upon every indulgence ; and must be withheld from obstinacy and rebellion, by seasonable discipline and repeated denials. We must withdraw our affections, therefore, from the pleasures of this world, by not only abstaining en-

tirely from all criminal gratifications, but by voluntarily denying ourselves many innocent ones : *so shall an entrance be more abundantly ministered to us into that everlasting kingdom* (1 Pet. i. 11.), which *flesh and blood cannot inherit* (1 Cor. xv. 50.) ; into that place, which is prepared for saints and angels, but which *no unclean thing can enter* ; into that region, where will be light and joy for the *pure in heart* who can *see God* in it (Matt. v. 8.) ; but whose brightness would be no brightness, but gloominess and horror, to the soul that wants that holiness, without which, *no man shall see him*. (Heb. xii. 14.)

Once more : Are the affections of envy, malice, revengefulness, and the like, utterly incompatible with an affection for, and enjoyment of, heaven ? *Wherefore, now, you also put off all these ; and put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering ; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any ; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.* (Col. iii. 8. 12, 13.) Can we be implacable and unmerciful to each other, who each of us expect to have so much forgiven by our common Lord and Master ? And when, to the unparalleled mercies, we add the precious promises, the glorious prospects of the gospel, these, surely, cannot fail to banish all malice and hatred from the breasts, all rancour and bitterness from the discourse, all quarrels and contentions from the conversation, of those, who are in good earnest candidates for heaven, and have hopes full of immortality. (Wisd. iii. 4.)

To conclude : *If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above* (Col. iii. 1.) ; and, lest ye be found in the number of *those seekers who shall not be able to enter* (Luk. xiii. 24.), let the diligence and earnestness of your search bear some proportion to the dignity and excellence of the glorious object of it. *The prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus* (Phil. iii. 14.) is a prize, which will abundantly recompense all your pains, and will fully answer all the affection you can set upon it : a prize too, which you may all be competitors for, and yet your pretensions never interfere with each other. May we all, then, with united endeavours, press toward the mark for it ! May all our pursuits be made subordinate to this ; and all our competitions swallowed up in it !

it! It is worth while to lay aside every weight in order to run with success the great race that is set before us (Heb. xii. 1.); the reward proposed is a crown incorruptible (1 Cor. ix. 25.); and, though we all run, we may each of us obtain it!

That we may, every one of us, so run as to obtain (1 Cor. ix. 24.) may God grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

S E R M O N VI.

God the Giver of Rain and fruitful Seasons; and the Uses we ought to make of that Consideration.

Acts, xiv. 17.

Nevertheless, he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

THESE words are the conclusion of a short, but beautiful, speech of St. Paul to the Lycaonians. The occasion was this: St. Paul accompanied with Barnabas had, in virtue of that miraculous power which was for wise ends and purposes granted to the first propagators of Christianity, wrought a very signal cure upon an impotent man, a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked (Acts, xiv. 8.): for, notwithstanding this inveteracy of his disorder, or rather this his natural incapacity, no sooner had the Apostle pronounced the emphatical words, *Stand up right on thy feet*; but the impotent man leaped and walked. (Acts, xiv. 10.) The people of Lystra, convinced that so wonderful a cure must have exceeded the power of any mere man, and yet blinded by the prejudices of Heathen superstition, presently concluded, that the gods were come down to them in the likeness of men (Acts, xiv. 11.): and accordingly, giving them the names (Acts, xiv. 12.) of those Pagan deities they had been accustomed to worship, were proceeding in haste to perform the usual rites of homage and adoration: *The priest of Jupiter, who was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.* (Acts, xiv. 13.)

Upon this, the holy men of God, touched at once with astonishment and compassion by so affecting an appearance, ran in among the people (Acts, xiv. 14.), de-

firing, without delay, not only to prevent the idolatrous worship intended to be paid to themselves, but to remove the occasion of any such criminal observances for the future, by directing them to the true and only object of religious worship. To this end, they begin with a gentle, but affectionate, exhortation, *Sirs, why do ye these things?* (Acts, iv. 15.) They assure them, that *themselves were but men*, and therefore had no claim to any adoration, nor durst receive any: that one great design of their now coming among them was, to turn them from these vain and idolatrous practices to the regular worship of the living God, who made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: that indeed their having fallen into such depraved notions and superstitious practices heretofore might be more excusable, than their continuance in them now could be; because God had not then, in the same extraordinary manner interposed to prevent them, but had in times past suffered all nations (or as it should be rendered, all the Heathen, in opposition to the Jews,) to walk in their own ways (Acts, xiv. 16.): and yet, that such unaccountable delusions, even among the unenlightened Heathens, were not chargeable upon any failure on God's part, extraordinary interpositions and discoveries of his will were matter of favour not of debt; and where these were not vouchsafed, the ordinary communications of God's beneficence and goodness, in sending them a regular return of seasons, and crowning their honest labour with joy and success, were sufficient evidences of his being and providence, and such as ought to have made them entertain more worthy notions of him: *Nevertheless, he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.*

From the words thus opened and explained, I might take occasion to consider the state of the Gentile world before the preaching of the gospel to them, and to shew, that the ordinary appearances of nature in regard to the seasons of the year, the fruits of the ground, &c. were sufficient proofs of his being, and witness to his gracious providence over them; and that, therefore, if the greatest part of them were (as it is certain they were) sunk into the most depraved notions concerning

concerning his nature, the most absurd practices in his worship; the fault all the while was not in God but in themselves. But my design is to consider the words in a more popular view, and to render them more particularly useful.

And, for this purpose, I shall reduce what the time will permit me to offer, under the two following heads of inquiry:

First, To whom we are indebted for the blessings we enjoy; and particularly for *those fruitful seasons, that food and gladness*, which are at any time vouchsafed to us? And,

Secondly, What uses it will become us to make, on this and every like occasion, of the considerations that may occur under the foregoing head?

First, As to the former of these inquiries, I would hope much time need not be employed in giving a satisfactory answer to it. Every one who reads and acknowledges (as, I persuade myself, we all of us do) the divine authority of the Scriptures, will readily, and at least in the general allow, that the Being, to whom we are indebted for every thing we possess, is no other but God; that Being, *from whom every good gift and every perfect gift doth come* (Jam. i. 17.); in short, that Being, who first created all things by the word of his power, and who still disposeth all events according to the counsel of his own will. Intimations and express assertions to this purpose occur so very frequently in the sacred writings, that it would be almost endless to repeat them all; and indeed they so readily offer themselves to every one's memory, that I need not repeat any of them.

Say we *these things* from Scripture only, or saith not reason and the very light of nature the same also? Yes verily (1 Cor. ix. 8.): *the sound of an over-ruling Providence is gone out into all lands, and the belief of it into the ends of the world: there is neither speech nor language, but the apprehension of an all-seeing eye, and all-powerful superintendence, is heard among them.* (Psal. xix. 4.)

There was indeed a certain sect among the philosophers of old, who, though they acknowledged the being of a God, at least in words, yet idly persuaded themselves into a denial of his particular providence; fancying that he left the world to shift for itself as soon as he

had made it, and enjoyed himself in solitude and indolence: as if the care of a world were unworthy of him who first created it; or too troublesome an employment for that Great Being, *who fainteth not, neither is weary; but is infinite in power, and mighty in working.* (Isai. xl. 28.)

Shall we then have recourse to, I know not what, natures of things for solving the appearances we see, and for producing those *fruitful seasons, which fill our hearts with food and gladness*? But if by the natures of things be understood any thing different from the will of God, manifesting itself in the ordinary course of his providence, and exerting itself agreeably to those tendencies which himself originally impressed upon his creatures; it is a notion as extravagant and senseless, and indeed as inexcusable, as that of such as deny his being and providence; if it really differ from it any otherwise than only in name.

The truth is, the great Governor of the universe is a *God of order and not of confusion*; and does therefore ordinarily make second causes act regularly and uniformly. But if we thence conclude, that he has put the management of affairs in this lower world entirely out of his own hands, we are, in so doing, guilty of great folly as well as impiety. It is God alone, who so steadily conducts the motions of this great machine: the minutest movement of it is subject to his inspection and waits his orders: and, though he usually acts by the intervention of second causes, and agreeably to their natural tendencies; yet he can alter or suspend, he can retard or hasten, their motions and operations, whensoever and howsoever he pleases. *Whatsoever the Lord pleaseth, that doeth he in heaven and in earth, in the sea and in all deep places: he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings with the rain, bringing the winds out of his treasures.* (Psal. cxxxv. 6, 7.)

It is well worth observing, that several of the appearances we are here considering, are such as have never yet been accounted for from the known laws of nature. That *seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter* (Gen. viii. 22.), should not cease, but should succeed each other in an uniform order, is what we can indeed give some little account of, from such

causes as a diligent inquiry into nature enables us to assign: which causes, however, manifestly required an infinite wisdom to contrive them, and an almighty hand to put them in motion; and must ever require the same wisdom and power to conduct and uphold them: but then, as to the particular changes in the times; the arising of stormy winds, and the succession of calm; the great difference of weather in the very same seasons of different years; the long drought of one year, and the as long rains of another;—I say, these and such appearances, although they are matter of common observation, have something in them, which the most diligent and penetrating inquirers into the operations of second causes have hitherto been, and probably always will be, unable to explain: which must therefore be resolved into the *sole good pleasure* of that Being, who *doeth according to his will in the army of heaven* (Dan. iv. 35.); and who hath the whole creation so absolutely at his disposal, that those seemingly most unruly and untractable parts of it, *the winds and the sea, obey him.* (Mark, iv. 41.)

Shall we then ascribe the blessings we enjoy wholly to our own labour and industry, our prudence and good management? This, I fear, is a very common, but certainly very dangerous and sinful practice. We are far from denying, that your own industry and prudence are the proper means of ensuring, and such as are most usually attended with, success. Your care and attention are, no doubt, well employed about the concerns of this life, when kept in due subordination to a regular discharge of the duties of religion, and a proper regard to the concerns of another world. The dressing and cultivation of the ground was, by God's own appointment, the employment of our first parent in a state of innocence, and before his expulsion from paradise. Much more necessary then must the sweat of their faces be to his descendants in the present state of things. Your industry therefore is in itself so far from being inconsistent with your duty, that it really makes a part of it. We allow a great deal to care and labour: it is the channel by which the blessings of Providence are ordinarily conveyed to us: and it is the Apostle's rule, founded indeed in reason and equity, *that if any*

person will not work, neither should he eat. (1 Thess. iii. 8.)

However, though we allow thus much to industry, we must beware of resting here. Care and prudence are indeed the usual means of attaining success in temporal affairs, but we must always remember that they are only subordinate ones to the blessing of God, which alone maketh any thing we do, or engage in, to prosper. To convince us of this, human affairs are purposely so ordered, that *the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor yet bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding* (Eccl. ix. 11.) and activity. Most commonly indeed schemes wisely contrived, and well conducted will attain their proposed ends: but we meet with instances to the contrary more than enow to satisfy us, that *time and chance, favourable seasons or cross accidents* (both under the direction of an over-ruling Providence) *happen to them all.*

And if this observation hold true in the general course of human affairs, it is still more visibly so in the particular case before us. For, alas! after all our lofty pretensions, what is it which the best of us all can do towards the production of a plentiful harvest?—of a plentiful harvest, did I say? nay, of a single ear of corn, or a blade of grass? Something we may do, in subserviency to the Divine Providence; but, independently of that, nothing, or worse than nothing. We have just strength enough to quicken our industry; but weakness enough we must always be conscious of to check our presumption and mortify our self-sufficiency.

What St. Paul has observed of preaching the gospel, is in some measure applicable to the case before us: *One may plant, and another water*; but, after all, it is *God that must give the increase.* (1 Cor. iii. 6.) Nay, the truth is, we are not able to do so much as this. We may sow or plant indeed; but *is there any among the vanities of the heathen that can cause rain?* (Jer. xiv. 22.) as the Prophet speaks; or can we devise any method to supply the want of it? No: *except the Lord bless the ground, your labour is but lost that till it: it is in vain that ye haste to rise up early, and late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness* (Psal. cxviii. 1. 3.); if he *command not the clouds from above, and open not the doors of heaven* (Psal.

(Psal. lxxviii. 23.): if he do not cause his sun to shine, and his rain to fall in their season, *your own strength*, in the disparaging but very just representation of the Prophet, *is but to sit still.* (Isai. xxx. 7.)

It is in order more effectually to convince, and more successfully to remind, us of this useful and important truth, (we may believe,) that the Almighty is pleased sometimes to defeat your labours; to disappoint your fairest hopes and most promising expectations; by first sending, as an effect of your industry, in cultivating your lands, a plentiful crop; and then, as a punishment of your unmindfulness of his providence, by denying you the opportunity to eat thereof. This an Almighty hand hath various methods of accomplishing; either by blasting or mildew, or by (what the Prophet Joel calls) *his great army, the locust, caterpillar, canker-worm or palmer-worm* (Joel, ii. 25.); or (which is more frequent in these countries) by overflowing floods, by unseasonable, immoderate, and lasting rains. He delights not (we may be sure) in the miseries or disappointments of his creatures as such; nor does he afflict willingly or grieve the children of men. (Lam. iii. 23.) But when his creatures forget their dependence upon him, it is time to awaken in them a due sense of it, by seasonable chastisements affecting them in the very instance of their forgetfulness and ingratitude; to convince them, that where their labour is most of all in their own disposal, the success of it still depends upon his good-pleasure; and that, however the fruits of the ground may be called theirs, the seasons for gathering them are his.

An eminent instance of unthankfulness for favours of this kind we find recorded by Hosea, and as eminent a proof of the Divine displeasure for it: *She did not know or consider* (says the Prophet concerning the people of Israel) *that I gave her corn and wine and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold.* (Hos. ii. 8.) And what was the consequence of this? why, says God, *I will return and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in its season; and will recover my wool and my flax; and I will destroy her vines and her fig-trees.* (Hos. ix. 12.)

The truth is, we are all of us ready enough to own, many of us (I fear) to

complain, that the disappointment of our labours is to be ascribed to God. And why should we not as readily allow the success of them to be ascribed to the same great cause? If we will believe the holy Psalmist, it is the same God who *maketh a fruitful land barren for the wickedness of them that dwell therein* (Psal. cvii. 34.); and who again, upon the amendment of its inhabitants, *turneth the wilderness into a standing water, and dry ground into water-springs.* (Psal. cvii. 35.) And accordingly it is to the same gracious Being that he addresses the following beautiful description, with which I shall close this head: *Thou visitest the earth and blessest it; thou makest it very plenteous: the river of God is full of water; thou preparest their corn, for so thou providest for the earth: thou waterest her furrows; thou sendest rain into the little valleys thereof: thou makest it soft with the drops of rain, and blessest the increase of it: thou crownest the year with thy goodness, and thy clouds drop fatness: they shall drop upon the dwellings of the wilderness, and the little hills shall rejoice on every side: the folds shall be full of sheep; the valleys also shall stand so thick with corn, that they shall laugh and sing!* (Psal. lv. 9—13.)

From what has been said I would hope we are all of us duly sensible, *to whom we are indebted for the blessings we enjoy, and particularly for those fruitful seasons, that food and gladness, which may be at any time vouchsafed to us.* It is time, then, that I should proceed to inquire,

Secondly, What uses it may become us to make of the foregoing reflections, upon this and every like occasion.

Now these uses may relate to the manner of our receiving, or of our enjoying, or of our employing, the blessings conferred on us by Providence. And, I think, it is very obvious to infer from what has occurred to us under the former head, that we should receive them with due thankfulness to the bountiful giver; that we should enjoy them with a proper cheerfulness, but yet with sobriety; and that we should communicate a suitable proportion out of our own abundance to our brethren that may be in need.

First, It will on this and all occasions highly become us to express our thankfulness to the great Author for the blessings we have received.

Gratitude for benefits received is a
L 1 2 duty

duty so natural and obvious, that one would imagine it could hardly be necessary to mention, much less to enlarge upon and enforce it. This is a return for all favours very strongly suggested by nature itself; and is such as (I dare say) we all of us expect from those whom we have at any time obliged. Shall we then refuse to make that return to our great Creator, the author and giver of every thing we enjoy, which we expect from those of our fellow-creatures, on whom we have conferred any trivial favour? If we, being evil, know what to expect for our inconsiderable obligations laid upon one another, how much more justly may a beneficent and good God demand the most hearty acknowledgment from us, who are indebted to him, not only for the power of obliging others, but *for life and breath and all things?* (Acts, xvii. 25.)

And surely this, as it is a natural, so is it a very easy and cheap return for the plenty afforded us. We are not now, as God's people of old were, burthened with expensive observances and costly sacrifices. The Almighty, though he *knows all the fowls upon the mountains; though all the beasts of the forest are his, and the cattle upon a thousand hills* (Psal. l. 11.); yet he will *take no bullock out of our house, nor he-goat out of our fold.* (Psal. l. 9.) And shall we not then *freely offer unto him the unexpensive return of thanksgiving* (Psal. l. 14.); and gratefully acknowledge that all we have is from his bounty? *Had so gracious a benefactor bid us do some great thing, should we not have done it! how much more then, when he saith to us only, rejoice and give thanks!* (2 King. v. 13.)

A return however this is, which (I fear), how natural and easy soever in itself, we are often strangely unmindful of paying. It has frequently been remarked, that of *ten lepers*, that were *cleansed* by the miraculous operation of our blessed Lord, *but one returned to give glory to God.* (Luk. xvii. 12—13.) I am afraid the proportion too generally holds in common cases. Under the pressure of affliction or want we can cry mightily unto God; and perhaps complain of being hardly dealt with, if our apprehended grievances are not instantly removed. But when our prayers are heard, and our desires even outdone, are we as much moved with a sense of the Divine Goodness as we were before with the feeling of our own necessities? Every

man's conscience must answer for himself to this inquiry. Nor is it an inquiry of slight importance. The *hand-writing upon the wall* (Dan. v. 5, &c.) was a dreadful appearance to Belshazzar; and what was the occasion of so remarkable a visitation? why; *he had profaned the vessels of the temple, and had praised the gods of silver and of gold, &c.* and in this part of his crimes we may think ourselves no way concerned. But there is one great aggravation of his guilt still behind, in which we may do well to consider whether we are not partakers; for we find the prophet Daniel concluding his solemn charge against him in these memorable words: *the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified!* (Dan. v. 23.)

Hear what a character God himself gives of his own people by his prophet Jeremiah: *This people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart: they are revolted and gone.* (Jer. v. 23.) But what was it that could provoke Almighty God to describe his peculiar people in terms of so much reproach and resentment? The reason we have in the very next words: *they say not in their hearts, Let us now fear the Lord our God that giveth rain, both the former and the latter rain in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest.* (Jer. v. 24.) The Almighty, we see, looks upon our neglect to pay him our tribute of praise and thanksgiving as a revolt from our allegiance; and interprets our very silence in this case as an instance of treason and rebellion against himself. But,

Secondly, We are to partake of the plenty, conferred on us by Providence, with cheerfulness, and at the same time with sobriety.

I say, with cheerfulness: for we are not to imagine that the bountiful hand of Providence first spreads plenty before us, and then debars us the enjoyment of it by a severe interdict. The apostle, St. Paul, in his beautiful speech to the people of Lystra, represents it as an instance of God's goodness, that by *sending rain and fruitful seasons, he fills our heart with food and gladness* (Acts, iv. 17.): and he elsewhere informs us, that *every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused if it be received with thanksgiving.* (1 Tim. iv. 4.) The truth is, a cheerful enjoyment of the gifts of Heaven is a kind of thanki-

thanksgiving for them; nor can our hearts well be duly grateful for the things in which we have no degree of comfort or complacence. Those persons do great injury to our holy religion, who would represent it as a gloomy, melancholy thing: the consciousness of our being continually under the Divine superintendence and protection, is a perpetual fund for true joy and innocent cheerfulness.

Accordingly, we find the royal preacher, king Solomon, who was not only a careful observer of men and things, but who had by the special favour of Heaven a wise and understanding heart, more than once recommending such a comfortable enjoyment of its good things as this life would afford, in opposition to a sordid and penurious way of living: *for a man to enjoy the good of all his labours*, he tells us expressly, *is the gift of God*. (Eccl. v. 18, 19.) In another place, he represents it as *a fore evil under the sun*, and yet such an evil as was *common among men*; *that a man to whom God hath given riches, and wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing of all that his heart desireth; and yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof: this* (says he) *is vanity, and it is an evil disease!* (Eccl. vi. 1, 2.)

Authorities are needless in a case so plain. For a man to have a plentiful allotment of the accommodations of life, and yet to make no use of them for that purpose! to undergo the unavoidable toil and vexation of a passage through this world, and at the same time voluntarily to debar himself of those innocent refreshments which offer themselves to him by the way! in the midst of affluence to render himself as necessitous as those that want bread, though not so pitiable! *this surely is vanity, and it is an evil disease!*

Let me, however, by no means here be misunderstood. Great caution must be used in this particular; lest by avoiding one extreme we fall into another, and that such an one as is at least equally dangerous. Instead of using liberty for an occasion to the flesh, we must qualify our enjoyments with moderation, our cheerfulness with sobriety. Our pleasures must not exceed the bounds prescribed by reason and religion. Though we may gratify the innocent desires of our nature, we must beware of *making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof*. (Rom. xiii. 14.) Far be it from any one among

us to *turn the grace of God into lasciviousness*, or so far to misapply the bounty of Heaven, as to render it an occasion or encouragement to his own intemperance and brutality: like the certain rich man in one of our Lord's parables, whose ground having brought forth plentifully, he presently said to his soul, *Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry*. But you will recollect what God said unto him the same night—*This night shall thy soul be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided!* Whilst, therefore, we joy with the joy of harvest (Isai. ix. 3.), we must remember that we are men and Christians: and not be so wholly taken up with the thoughts of our own abundance, as to forget, from whom we receive, and in whose presence we enjoy it. The joy, which our holy religion allows, is not a noisy, and excessive or a riotous mirth; but a sober, chaste, temperate joy; a joy conducted under the fear of God, and terminating (as all our actions should do) in his glory. (1 Cor. x. 31.)

We should be careful also to regulate our pleasures with regard to the seasons as well as the degrees of them, and not suffer our, otherwise innocent, gratifications to interfere, either with a regular discharge of the offices of life, or with a due observance of the divine ordinances. *Every thing is beautiful in its time* (Eccl. iii. 11.): cheerful diversions may be innocent and proper on suitable occasions; and friendly visits among neighbours or relations will often be useful, nay commendable, means of preserving and promoting good-will amongst men. But, should we allow our diversions or our visits to detain us when the duties of our calling, and especially when the worship of our Maker, demand our attendance; this would be employing the blessings of God in an use quite contrary to that for which they were given us; and we may justly fear, that such pleasures must be dearly paid for, either in bitter repentance and remorse here, or in something far more dreadful hereafter! But moderation, in our enjoyment of good things afforded us, is the more necessary, because,

Thirdly, We are on such occasions of plenty to communicate a due proportion out of our abundance for the relief of our brethren that are in need.

There is a very remarkable precept given to the Jews, and repeated more than once in the law of Moses: *When ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest: and thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard: thou shalt leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the Lord your God.* (Lev. xix. 9, 10.—xxiii. 22. Deut. xxiv. 19, 20, 21.) Which last words are not added at all adventures, but with great propriety and significance: they contain a very powerful argument for performing the duty enjoined; and a beautiful anticipation of such objections or evasions as the Jews might perhaps be but too ready to make use of against it. *I am the Lord your God:* your plenty is all from my bounty; and I have therefore a right to demand what reserves I please out of it. And, again, *I am the Lord your God:* fear not therefore that your liberality shall ever occasion want to yourselves: the command is mine; and you may trust me with the consequences of a cheerful compliance with it!

And if such provision was made for the relief of the poor under the Mosaic dispensation, shall we suffer our distressed brethren to go unprovided for? we, who are *partakers of a better covenant, established upon better promises:* (Heb. viii. 6.) shall we *destroy him* for want of meat, *for whom Christ died?* (Rom. xiv. 15.) What a reproach would it be to us, what a reflection on our holy profession, should there, in these plenteous years, be found any among us in want of bread!

The truth is, they whose *lot is fallen to them in a fair ground, and who have a goodly heritage* (Psal. xvi. 6.), are rather stewards than proprietors of the plenty afforded them. The Almighty by *sending gracious rain upon his inheritance* (Psal. lxxviii. 9, 10.), does of his great goodness provide for the poor, and makes the rich the dispensers of his bounty towards them. *The rich and the poor, in this respect also, meet together; the Lord is the maker of them all* (Prov. xxii. 2.). He is the maker of them, not only as they are men, but as they are rich and poor. He has placed them in these different situations for many wise and

gracious purposes; and for this, among others, that the one might have the pleasure of receiving, and the other the much higher satisfaction of giving relief: that (in this sense also) *he that soweth and he that reapeth might rejoice together.* (John, iv. 36.)

Under the name of liberality to the necessitous, I would be far from recommending profuseness to all who would pass themselves upon us for such. You will carefully distinguish the modest and helpless, whom you know to be fit objects of compassion, from the lazy and clamorous, of whom you know nothing but their importunity. Neither reason nor religion require that they, who can, but will not work, should eat the fruit of the labour of their industrious neighbours. They that are such, deserve correction rather than relief; and far be it from me to plead for any such misapplication of your bounty, as the throwing it away upon them would be! But then, on the other hand, I must entreat you likewise, not to let your aversion to the idle and impudent vagrant ever make you turn away your faces from a poor man, or stop your ears to the cries of the humble supplicant. Charity and beneficence to such, under due regulations, is at once one of the noblest uses of the blessings of Providence, and is accepted by God as one of the properest returns we can make for them. A verbal acknowledgment is certainly right and our bounden duty, as far as it goes: but then it is against the common sense of mankind, to think of being fully grateful by entertaining our benefactor only with fair speeches, and bare professions of our obligations to him. Thus far, the most sordid and selfish will allow themselves to go. But an heart, warmed with real sentiments of gratitude, will by no means content itself with *offering to the Lord that only which costs him nothing.* (2 Sam. xxiv. 24.) On the other hand, to think of requiring God in any proper sense by a return of real benefits to him, would be equally irrational. All the services we can pay him, can make no addition to his complete blessedness. *What reward then shall we give unto the Lord for all the benefits he hath done, for all the plenty he hath vouchsafed unto us?* (Psal. cxvi. 12.) Why, he himself has prescribed the way to

to us. *Our goods are nothing to him*, it is true (Psal. xvi. 2.): but he has devolved his right to a due proportion out of them upon our necessitous brethren: he hath deputed them to receive these evidences or expressions of our gratitude to him: and, for our encouragement, has told us, that whatever relief or comfort we shall administer to them for his sake, he will accept as an instance of our love to himself: according to that memorable declaration of Solomon—*He that hath pity on the poor, lendeth unto the Lord* (Prov. xix. 17.); and that still more memorable declaration of a greater than Solomon,—*Inasmuch as ye have done it*, (speaking of those acts of kindness and compassion he had before mentioned) *inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.* (Matth. xxv. 40.)

Can words express a stronger incitement to what was, before, our reasonable service! *Who hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him,—how dwelleth the love of God in him!* (1 John, iii. 17.) Even humanity itself, where it is left in any degree, will scarce suffer us to see a distressed object without reaching forth all the relief in our power: and shall not the love of Christ constrain us to extend our beneficence to those whom he has constituted his receivers? Methinks, we should rather seek out for proper objects of our charity, than turn away on the other side when such offer themselves to us, bringing along with them so endearing a recommendation from our Saviour himself; who, though he was rich, rich in an higher sense than any created being can be, *yet for our sakes became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be rich.* (2 Cor. viii. 9.)

To conclude: If any here present be blessed with an abundant portion of the good things of this world, (which, I trust, may be the case of many that hear me this day) if, in particular, *the ground of any man lately brought forth plentifully*, (Luke, xii. 16.) remember, to whose bounty you stand indebted for every good gift; who it is that hath *given you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons; filling your hearts with food and gladness.* And, remember too, that the same affluence and plenty which ought to remind us of the goodness of our Creator, and of

the wants of our fellow-creatures, is but too fatally apt to render us unmindful of both. The transition is easy from being full to saying, *who is the Lord?* (Prov. xxx. 9.) and they who *anoint themselves with the chief ointments*, are but rarely found to be much *grieved for the afflictions of Joseph.* (Amos, vi. 6.) *When therefore we have eaten and are full, then more especially let us beware that we forget not the Lord our God* (Deut. viii. 10, 11.); because then we shall be most in danger of forgetting him; and our forgetfulness of him will then be attended with the highest aggravation, the foulest ingratitude. *In all our ways let us acknowledge God* (Prov. iii. 6.); and if *in the day of prosperity we rejoice* (Eccl. vii. 14.), (as surely with innocence we may) let us however *rejoice unto him with reverence.* (Psal. ii. 11.) By being ready to distribute, willing to communicate, let us at once derive his blessing on our present abundance, and lay up to ourselves a good foundation against the time to come (1 Tim. vi. 18, 19.): thus shall we *use this world as not abusing it* (1 Cor. vii. 31): our plenty will not be a snare, but a blessing, to us; till, from an innocent enjoyment of the bounties of Providence here, we shall be admitted to the everlasting glories of his presence hereafter.

To which happy state God, of his infinite mercy, bring us all, through the merits of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

S E R M O N VII.

The Influence of Piety on the Conduct of Human Life.

PROVERBS, iii. 5, 6.

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

THERE are no sentiments which the inspired writers seem more solicitous to encourage in the mind of man, than those of an habitual trust in the providence of God, expressed, on all proper occasions, in suitable acknowledgments, or acts of devotion towards him. And, considering the indigent condition of our nature, and the shortness of our views of things, there cannot, surely, be a privilege

lege more to be desired by us, than that of a ready access to a Being of infinite wisdom, power, and goodness, for the direction of our paths, and the supply of all our wants.

And yet, I fear, there is not any privilege more frequently slighted by us, than this. Weak and short-sighted as we are, we affect to be independent on any superior aid or information. In the eager prosecution of our various schemes, we neglect to apply to him, who alone can enable us to conduct them with success or safety: and, if he is pleased, notwithstanding, to permit them for a while to prosper, we begin to applaud our own foresight and activity; *sacrificing* (as the Prophet speaks) *to our net, and burning incense to our drag*; as if *by them*, and them only, *our portion were fat, and our meat plenteous*. (Hab. i. 16.) The pains we take in pursuit of knowledge, being exerted in the like self-sufficient manner, our attainments therein are apt to be considered as solely owing to our own unwearied diligence or uncommon penetration; and the glory thence arising, after being greatly magnified by our vain imaginations, is of course made to terminate singly in ourselves. A proceeding, however, this is, not only undutiful and injurious to Almighty God, but highly prejudicial to our own real interest. For, after all, *the Lord is King, be we never so impatient* (Psal. xcix. 1.) or unmindful of his dominion. He who first made this world, will also govern it: He will prosper our undertakings or defeat our labours just as he sees good: and, if he is at any time pleased to allow that success to our projects or our studies, which we neglect to ask him; he always can, and generally doth, sooner or later, shew, that such success was far enough from being ordained to our lasting benefit. Where *the blessing of our Lord maketh rich, he addeth no sorrow with it* (Prov. x. 22.): but without his blessing, *even in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow*. (Eccl. i. 18.)

With a view to this prevailing but fatal error in the conduct of human life, and in order to prevent (as far as may be) the younger part of my hearers especially from falling into it; I have made choice of the words of my text, and shall endeavour, as usefully as I can,

to explain and enforce the advice contained in them:—*Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*

They are the words of the wise king Solomon, affectionately admonishing his son or disciple: and, as he had, himself, at his entrance upon public life, asked and obtained of God *an understanding heart* (1 Kings, iii. 9, &c.) to conduct him with honour through it, we may fairly suppose him to be thus recommending the same devout practice to the person whom he is here instructing:—“My son, thou art just going forth into a world, full of perplexities and temptations; which easily beset the young and unexperienced; and by which the self-conceited and self-willed are ever most in danger of being entangled to their ruin: but, if any of these should entice thee, consent thou not to be of their number: instead of confidently leaning upon thine own understanding, be thy trust reposed on him, whose understanding is infinite. To him let thy recourse be in every exigency; and, if in particular, *thou lackest wisdom, ask of him*. (James, i. 5.) If in all thy ways thou shalt thus acknowledge him, he will not fail to direct thy paths; he shall make thy passage through life plain before thee: he shall conduct thee safely, if not to the accomplishment of thy wishes, yet to the attainment of something still more for thy real advantage.—*Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*”

We have in the words, thus considered, an encouragement to trust in God, and to make our applications to him: an encouragement of great moment through the whole course of life, but especially in those early stages of it, on the regulation whereof the happiness of the remaining ones will always greatly depend. However, lest so comfortable an invitation, whilst it guards against the fatal extreme of self-sufficiency and impiety, should be misapplied to the scarce less pernicious purposes of slothfulness or enthusiasm, it may be proper,

First, To explain the import of the advice here given, and to shew what is implied in it.

Second-

Secondly, To illustrate the propriety of it, in reference to the end here proposed. And then,

Thirdly, To subjoin a reflection or two, suited to the subject, by way of conclusion from the whole.

I. As to the import of the advice itself: To trust in God, in opposition to leaning unto our own understandings, must be, instead of confiding solely or principally in our own wisdom or abilities, to put ourselves under the direction of his laws, and the guardianship of his providence: as, again, by *acknowledging him in all our ways*, must (I conceive) be meant, *setting him always before us*, and recognizing our perpetual dependence upon him, by those acts of piety, the refusal or continued neglect of which would amount to a denial of him.

And, by every such act, we cannot understand less than a deliberate approach of the heart to God: under an immediate recollection of his intimate presence with us, and supreme disposal of every thing that can in any way affect us: with a filial reliance upon his willingness to hear our petitions, as well as his power to give us what we desire of him: and, in us Christians particularly, with a lively faith in his promises by Christ Jesus: *in whose name* we are directed to *ask whatsoever* we stand in need of (John, xvi. 23.); and *in whom* alone, as sinful creatures, *we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him*. (Eph. iii. 12.)

Let me add, in reference to the measure of our trust in God, and the nature of our applications to him, that these, being grounded upon his perfections and our wants, should always be regulated by a due consideration of both. Were we to take a view of God's power and goodness separately from his other attributes, or of our own abilities only as they are in themselves, we could hardly make our addresses under too strong an assurance in the former, or too entire a disregard of the latter. But, when we consider God as wise, and just, and holy, as well as powerful and gracious; and ourselves as feeble and indigent, nay unable to think or do any thing as of ourselves, yet furnished with powers capable of enlargement with such help as is always ready, and by proper exertion applicable to many excellent purposes; we see the improprie-

ty of expecting from God any such assistance, as it can be neither fit for him to give, nor for us to receive. If our own understandings may not be wholly relied upon, yet neither must they be wholly neglected. Our faculties in general are the gift of God; and must therefore not only be thankfully received but diligently employed and improved (as far as we can improve them) as talents for which we are accountable to him.

But to be a little more particular: The temper and practice now under consideration must be founded in, or accompanied and completed by, a lowly sense of our own natural insufficiency; a devout application to him, who alone can supply our defects; a careful use of such means as he has put within our power; a steady resolution to reject all expedients disagreeable to his will, and a dutiful acquiescence in his dispensations; alike prepared to adore his wisdom in the delay or the denial of our requests, as to acknowledge his bounty in the more direct grant of them.

The first requisite just mentioned is a diffidence of ourselves, or a consciousness of our want of some superior guidance. He that cometh unto God as a petitioner for wisdom, must previously be convinced, that *it is not in man to direct his steps* (Jer. x. 23.): that, in what relates to future advantages in life, we see but a very little way before us; often disappointed where most sanguine, and sometimes happy where most disappointed: that, in matters of human science, *hardly do we guess aright at the things that are on the earth* (Wisd. ix.), and with all our labour can penetrate little farther than the outside of things most within our cognizance: that, in reference to our innocence, *when we think we stand firmest and most secure*, we are especially concerned to *take heed lest we fall* (1 Cor. x. 12.): that, as to *things in heaven*, the nature and *counsels of God*, and the transcendent objects of an invisible world, these are too far removed from our sphere to be *searched out or known by us, except he himself sent wisdom from above* (Wisd. xi. 16, 17.): that, although *God hath by his spirit revealed to us many things, which eye hath not seen* before (1 Cor. ii. 9. 10.); yet, even now, *we can see them only as through a glass darkly* (1 Cor. xiii. 12): and, that there are still in the accounts of them *some things hard to be understood*,

derstood, which we may, by our vanity and presumption, without the assistance of the same spirit, *wrest to our own destruction.* (2 Pet. iii. 16.) They, who *think of themselves more highly than they ought to think*, are but ill prepared to *trust in the Lord with all their hearts* (Rom. xii. 3.); and, instead of *duly acknowledging him in all their ways*, will be ready to ask, *what profit shall we have, if we pray unto him?* (Job xxi. 15.)

On the other hand, the humble-minded man, conscious of his own inability, will *look up to him, from whom cometh his help.* Notwithstanding the great disorder introduced into our constitution, we still feel something in acts of piety wonderfully adapted to the spiritual part of it; which, when neither neglected in the season for its early cultivation, nor afterwards encumbered with the cares of this world, or immersed in sensual indulgences, nor estranged by sinful habits, almost naturally returns in devout aspirations to God who gave it. Accordingly, the good man, whatever his situation or circumstances, whatever his occupation or profession may be, will daily recommend himself and all his concerns to the Divine blessing. Even the artificer and the husbandman, among other methods of acquiring skill, and ensuring success in their respective employments, will never forget, that *this also cometh of the Lord of Hosts, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.* (Isai. xxviii. 29.) The prudent statesman, when looking abroad for powerful allies, will not neglect his friendship, *with whom, emphatically, is strength and wisdom; in whose hand are the hearts of men; and who can, when he sees fit, lead the ablest counsellors away spoiled.* (Job, xii. 16, 17.) In the pursuit of useful learning, the well-disposed student will beg of God to *give him wisdom that sitteth by his throne* (Wisd. ix. 4.); to enlighten his understanding, and to bless his researches; to guard him against the delusions of vain philosophy, and those snares into which even knowledge is apt to betray the carnal mind. Above all, the devout Christian will constantly implore the assistance of that spirit, who dictated the sacred writings; who alone is able *so to open his understanding, as that he may understand the Scriptures* (Luke, xxiv. 45.); *so to touch his heart as that he may seriously attend to, and effectually embrace, those*

things that are spoken (Acts, xvi. 14.) in them.

Still, however, such addresses to Heaven must be accompanied by the diligent use of those other means that may be in our power. In vain (for instance) shall we, with the pious Psalmist, beseech God *to open our eyes, that we may see the wonderful things of his law* (Psalm. cxix. 18.); unless we can say with him too, *all the day long is my study in it.* (Psalm. cxix. 97.) If, in the sublime language of the Evangelical Prophet, we call upon *the heavens to drop down from above*, and upon *the skies to pour down righteousness* (Isai. xlv. 8.); if we expect *the earth to open, and bring forth salvation*, we ourselves must, like wise husbandmen, prepare the ground, by *breaking the clods, and making plain the face thereof*; we must *cast in the principal wheat and the appointed barley and the rye into their places* (Isai. xxviii. 24, 25.); or, (in the words of Hosea) we must *break up our fallow ground, and sow to ourselves in righteousness*, if ever we hope to *reap in mercy.* (Hos. x. 12.) Even the Apostles, to whom our Lord's well-known admonition against *thoughtfulness* (Matt. x. 16, 19, 23.), was eminently, if not peculiarly addressed, had the *wisdom of the serpent*, in conjunction with the *harmlessness of the dove*, recommended to them by the same authority; and were so far from being denied the use of human precaution, as to be directed, *when persecuted in one city, to flee into another.* St. Paul, in his instructions to Timothy, recommends *salutary remedies for the infirmities* (1 Tim. v. 23.) of his body, as well as *attentive reading for the profiting* (1 Tim. iv. 13.) of his mind. And though we find him, in exhorting his *Philippian converts to prayer*, advising them to *be careful for nothing*; (Phil. iv. 10, 14, 16.) yet, that he disapproved not of every kind or degree, of even worldly carefulness, may be learnt from almost the next words, where he mentions, with commendation, their care for his support; towards which they could hardly have sent once and again without some care taken for their own: and, as to their spiritual concerns, so far is he from discharging them of all thoughtfulness, on account of God's *free grace working in them*, that he presses that very consideration as an argument, why they should *work out their own salvation*, not only with care and diligence, but with fear

fear and trembling. (Phil. ii. 12, 13.) The truth is, we are to *cast all our care of events upon God* (1 Pet. v. 7, 8.); but not so as to become careless of the means, or at all the less sober and vigilant ourselves. To neglect our own part in any undertaking, on a presumption that God's providence will accomplish the whole for us, were to suppose him a patron of sloth, not a rewarder of industry: and whoever thus trusts in God, will be sure to affront him.

But farther: If to depend upon God's favour whilst we are doing nothing for ourselves, cannot but be displeasing to him, how much more provoking would it be to hope for his blessing upon the violation of his laws! Indeed, so glaring an absurdity, so shocking an impiety, this must be, that one would think it hardly possible to be fallen into, or necessary to be guarded against, had we not heard with our ears, what wild disorders have, in our own days, been introduced into the public worship of Almighty God, by men pretending all the while to a peculiar intimacy with him: or *had not our fathers told us*, how not only falsehood and treachery, but sacrilege and parricide, were, *in the times before them*, recommended to the favour of Heaven under all the formalities of prayer and fasting. But, to such a dependence on God as this, his holy word gives no encouragement, much to the contrary. *Trust in the Lord, and be doing good* (Psal. xxxvii. 3.), says the Psalmist: and Solomon, after the invitation in my text to the same religious confidence, presently adds, *fear the Lord, and depart from evil.* (Prov. iii. 7.) How necessary soever it may appear, in the accounts of both philosophy and theology, that the first cause should concur with second causes in all their operations; yet, if any thing may be known of God from either, it is this, *that he is of purer eyes than to look on iniquity* (Hab. i. 13.) with any degree of approbation. When, therefore, he thinks fit (as for wise reasons he often may think fit) to suffer irregular and even unjust measures to take place, and so far to co-operate with the authors of them, we must by no means suppose him to favour the one or the other. Such proceedings can never be well-pleasing to a God of order, or a righteous Judge of all the earth. And should we, to the folly of partaking in them, add the impiety of

imploping his blessing upon them, we should not only fight against God, but attempt to engage him to fight against himself.

Once more: The temper recommended in my text implies not only a firm reliance on God's providence at the time of presenting our addresses to him, but an undeviating acquiescence in his disposal afterwards; far from desponding upon every disappointment, or, upon every delay of a favourable answer, striking out of the straight road of duty into any crooked paths. When king Saul (1 Sam. xxviii. 6, &c.), in his perplexity, found he could obtain no satisfaction from any of God's usual methods of communicating with his then favourite people, either by dreams, or by urim, or by Prophets; the Sacred History informs us, how most unhappily, as well as inconsistently, he had recourse to that very method of inquiry, which himself had before justly condemned and prosecuted with severity. Not so *the man after God's own heart.* He had his distresses and dejections of mind, like other men; under which we find him more than once crying out, *Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me!* (Psal. xlii, xliii. and xxvii. lxxi, &c.) But did he utterly faint, or fly to any unwarrantable expedients? No: his *sure trust* was in the *goodness of God* (see partic. 1 Sam. chap. xxiv. and xxvi, &c.); and, having often experienced the sufficiency of that support, he was always willing to tarry the Lord's leisure for a happy deliverance out of his troubles, and the seasonable accomplishment of all his desires. There is something, if possible, yet more glorious in the memorable declaration of the Prophet Habbakuk: *Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine; though the labour of the olive shall fail, and the field shall yield no meat; though the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation!* (Hab. iii. 17, 18.) A pitch of resignation this, devoutly to be aspired to, though with difficulty to be attained, by every good man under the like trials. Nay, should any of us find cause to complain in the words of holy Job: *Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left-hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him;*

him; he hideth himself on the right-hand, that I cannot see him (Job, xxiii. 8, 9.): still we should be ready to say, after the same pattern, *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.* (Job. xiii. 15.)

Upon the whole: We must so trust in God as to use our own sincere endeavours: so endeavour, as neither to neglect God's assistance, nor to forfeit his favour. Then shall either the thing we wish for, or something still better, in due season, be given us. For every one that thus asketh, receiveth; and he, that thus seeketh, findeth; and to him, that thus knocketh, there shall be an opening. (Matt. vii. 8.) Which leads me to consider,

II. The propriety of trusting in God, and acknowledging him as already explained, in order to obtain direction to our paths, and success to our undertakings.

Now the propriety of applying to another for direction or help in any instance, evidently presupposes an insufficiency in the person himself so applying; a sufficiency in the person applied to; and reasonable encouragement from the latter, that he will be ready to give all necessary assistance, upon proper application made to him. And, I hope, many words need not be used to shew the propriety of the practice hitherto explained, from each of the considerations here suggested.

That a consciousness of our own insufficiency is requisite previously to our addresses to Heaven, has already been observed. And, surely, every thing we feel within us, every thing we see without us, must contribute to imprint in our minds this mortifying, but useful, sense of our own weakness. For, what indeed is it, which by any sagacity or efforts merely our own, we are able to discover, to contrive, or to execute? With regard even to our secular affairs, we cannot foresee the smallest of those commonly called accidents, upon which the success often principally depends. Neither can we, without permission at least, direct any of those instruments, that seem to be most under our direction, towards the end we propose; nor, if we could go thus far, are we able to ensure that blessing, without which the acquisition itself can profit us nothing.

But, if we are weak, God is strong; yea his strength is made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor. xii. 9.); and though, without

him, we can do nothing (John, xv. 5.), yet through him we may do all things. (Phil. iv. 13.) His wisdom is infinite, his power irresistible, and his goodness equal to both. He knows our wants; and, numerous as they are, he can abundantly supply them. He is emphatically a God of knowledge. (1 Sam. ii. 3.) He sees, at one comprehensive view, not only those consequences of things and actions, about which, as having some visible connection, men of sagacity may form probable guesses, but also such remote events, as to our apprehensions seem most casual. Nay, as he understandeth our thoughts afar off (Psal. cxxxix. 2.), the contingent effects of our free choice are not hidden from his view. And, surely, knowledge so wonderful and excellent, must render him, who is essentially possessed of it, infinitely more capable of directing us in all cases, than we ourselves, or the most penetrating of our fellow-creatures; who are utterly unqualified, at least with any certainty, to shew us things to come.

"True," says the refining sceptic, willing to cast off fear (Job, xv. 4.), though under the pretence of only restraining prayer before God, "the Supreme Being knows every thing, and can, therefore, need none of our informations: nay, he certainly will do what is right upon the whole, without any incitement or application from us. Whereas, to suppose, that our prayers could induce him, in any given case, to act otherwise towards us, than he would of himself choose to act, were to suppose, that our performances or our omissions could alter his purposes, and even subject his measures to ours. Or, however, after all, how shall we know, when, or in what instances, he regards our addresses; or whether our affairs are in reality bettered, or even at all affected, by them?"

The answer to all this brings us to consider, what encouragement we have to believe, that, as God is always able, so he will, upon our application to him, be ready to supply our wants. Let me only first observe, upon how fallacious, as well as presumptuous, a representation of this matter, the above-mentioned exceptions or queries proceed. Even under the light of nature (if, indeed, we can form any adequate notion concerning it), prayers, I presume, were offered to God with a design not to inform him of men's wants, but

but to acknowledge their dependence on his bounty; not to work any change in his purposes, but to render the supplicants more proper objects of his favour. An all-perfect Being can need no importunity to induce him to do what is right. Yet a wise governor of moral agents may judge it right and reasonable to grant many things to those among them, who devoutly apply to him, which it might be neither right nor reasonable to confer on such others, as are *too proud to care for his help, or even to have him in all their thoughts.* (Psal. x. 4.)

But, in whatever light the case of frail mortals upon earth, invoking the transcendent Majesty of heaven, might have appeared to our unassisted speculations, the discoveries, which God hath made to us of his will and our duty, have happily cleared up this among many important questions. The same God, who is the supreme dispenser of all blessings, must have an unquestionable right to bestow his own gifts on his own conditions: and he hath been pleased, wisely and graciously, to declare our asking them of him one of the principal conditions, on which we must expect to obtain them. I say, wisely and graciously; for, as it is of the utmost importance to our innocence and our happiness, that we should be habitually sensible of our continual dependence on him, so nothing contributes more towards preserving such a sense always fresh in our mind, than constant applications to him. And, accordingly, the examples and declarations, that occur in his holy word, in favour of such applications, are too numerous to be all here produced, and, I trust, also are so well known, that I need not detain you with any distinct recital of them.

And here, indeed, it is, that we Christians may most safely ground our hopes in a performance, from which (if we should at all have thought of it) an awful apprehension of God's perfections, and of our own unworthiness, might otherwise have greatly discouraged, if not utterly deterred, us. *We may now come boldly unto the throne of grace* (Heb. iv. 16.): especially if, in compliance with his last and fullest direction to mankind upon this article, we so far acknowledge our unfitness for the high privilege of directly approaching him, as to ask in the name, not of departed saints, or even of angels, but of *the*

Mediator, his beloved son, in whom he has declared himself well pleased. (1 Tim. ii. 5. Matt. iii. 17.) A direction, which at once removes all objection to the propriety of this duty, and affords the humble-minded Christian the strongest inducement to *continue instant in it* (Rom. xii. 12.), the most comfortable hopes of its prevailing efficacy.

We readily acknowledge, that now, under the gospel dispensation, especially since the authentic revelation of God's will has been closed, and miracles have ceased, the best of men are seldom favoured with any such direct answers as are recorded to have been given, not only to the high-priest asking counsel of God in a way peculiar to the Jewish œconomy, but to other pious persons spreading their cases, and *pouring out their hearts before him.* Not but that, even then, we find him sometimes represented as *a God that hideth himself.* (Isai. xlv. 15.) And if, notwithstanding, good men constantly addressed him, as *the God that heareth prayer* (Psal. lxxv. 2.), it should be sufficient for our encouragement to be told by himself, that, though we may not always receive immediate answers, *we ought always to pray, and not to faint.* (Luke, xviii. 1.) Neither is it at all necessary, that we should be able, with exactness, to distinguish such vouchsafements of favour as are granted in return for our humble petitions, from the ordinary evidences of his beneficence and goodness. If the same kind of assistance from above be not in these days given, or in the same distinguishable manner, as in the days of old, still we are assured, that devout application for such assistance, as may be yet wanted, *is our reasonable service.* And where we cannot clearly trace the footsteps of a divine interposition, we may see reason enough to rest satisfied, that our prayers have not returned empty into our bosoms. We cannot err in ascribing every blessing we have to the bounty of Providence: nor will any of our enjoyments lose its relish, by being considered as the gift of God.

Before I conclude this head, you will permit me briefly to apply what has been observed upon the propriety and efficacy of asking from God wisdom in general, to some of the principal kinds of wisdom, and such as are the most usual objects of men's aims and pursuits.

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Nor will even the wisdom of this world, so much of it, I mean, as can deserve to be called wisdom (for I meddle not with that low cunning which sometimes usurps the name), need to be wholly left out of this application: so far, otherwise, that (I am persuaded) the wisest manager of secular affairs may find the time he has employed in imploring the favour of Heaven, sooner or later, turning to the best account. It is matter of common observation, how much the outward prosperity, and (which is of far greater moment) the inward satisfaction and happiness of the man, generally depends upon the first setting forward of the youth; upon his own choice, or the choice made for him, of his occupation or profession, of his companions and his friends. The adjustment of these points, therefore, must be one principal object of worldly wisdom: nor, indeed, can the young man proceed upon too mature deliberation, or with too good advice, where he is so nearly interested. Yet, when all is done, our best-formed judgments can, in cases of this nature, rise no higher than to probable conjectures. And to whom can we so properly have recourse, jointly with our other methods of consultation, as to that wise and good Being, who alone sees whether poverty or riches, whether an obscure or an elevated station, or (which seems generally most eligible) a mean between the two extremes, is best suited to our abilities or our tempers; and who only is able to *feed us with food* (Prov. xxx. 8.), or to place us in a situation convenient for us?

Then, as to that important branch of human wisdom, which is employed in governing ourselves, or in rightly ordering our affections and actions: *the fear of the Lord is certainly the beginning of this wisdom* (Psal. cxi. 10.), and application to him not only the instituted means, but one of the best natural methods for attaining it. *Into a malicious soul, as the son of Sirach hath observed, wisdom shall not enter, nor dwell in a body that is subject unto sin.* (Wisd. i. 4.) And we Christians know, from yet higher authority, that *fleshly lusts war against the soul* (1 Pet. ii. 11.); they *grieve God's holy spirit* (Eph. iv. 30.), which dwelleth in us, and *quench* (1 Thess. v. 19.) his blessed influences. But here, devout prayer comes in to our relief: this, when duly performed, not only con-

ciliates the needful succours of divine grace, but strengthens our rational powers, and checks the impetuosity of our craving appetites. Accordingly, we find our Lord, who knew what was in man, and his Apostles after his example, almost constantly joining prayer with watching, in their exhortations upon this point.

Yet, if possible, still more expedient must it be, to ask of God that wisdom, which is to give us understanding in *the things of God*. (1 Cor. ii. 14.) *These* (as St. Paul informs us) *the natural man receiveth not, neither can he know them; because they are spiritually discerned*. I am aware, this declaration may seem to relate to the original discovery of the saving truths of the gospel, and to man's inability of arriving at the knowledge of them by any natural powers of his own, rather than to the ordinary attainment of such knowledge after they are revealed: in respect of which, our rational faculties may certainly be of use, and cannot be too faithfully exercised. However, what has just been observed, of the efficacy of devotion, in regard to moral wisdom, is yet more applicable to divine knowledge. Frequent prayer is not less needful to the support of our spiritual life, than regular food is to the sustenance of our animal frame: and, as to improvement in Christian knowledge and practice, prayer is not only by God's appointment a condition, but, in its own tendency, an instrument thereof: by elevating our thoughts, it enlarges our spiritual capacity, and, by calming our inferior passions, it prepares us for the illapses of the spirit of grace: the reality of whose operations upon our spirits, it cannot surely be more difficult to believe, than that of many other things, about whose existence we have no doubt, though we are equally unable to define the manner of them. And yet, after all, one of the safest methods with many, and a necessary method with us all, of asking from God spiritual wisdom, is that of seeking his direction, and hearkening what he saith to us, in the standing revelation he hath given us: not so much relying upon extraordinary illuminations, which we have no peculiar right to expect, and concerning which we may easily mistake, as, upon the ordinary influences of divine grace, assisting our own sincere endeavours, and accompanying the means of God's appointment: such as read-

ing and meditating upon his written word, and devoutly attending his worship and ordinances, in communion with his church: in which methods the generality of Christians may always best satisfy themselves, that they are regularly consulting the oracles of God, and obtaining that information, which will *make them wise unto salvation*. But, to return.

Even, in regard to human learning, that wisdom, which men's own painful study may seem most capable of acquiring; this, also, as far as it is desirable, (and desirable, surely, it must be, in its proper order), may, with great propriety, have a place in our addresses to *the Father of lights*. If God himself declares to Moses, that he *putteth wisdom in the hearts of all that are wise-hearted, in all manner of workmanship* (Exod. xxxi. 5, 6.); and if skill in agriculture is by Isaiah expressly said to *come from him* (Isai. xxviii. 29.); such attainments as seem more directly intellectual, cannot but, with at least equal reason, be asked of, or ascribed to, *the God of the spirits of all flesh*. He is the author and preserver of all our faculties. *In him we live, and move, and have our being*. (Acts, xvii. 28.) And, as he must, therefore, be constantly present with our minds, and conscious of all their workings, he can (we may be sure) always adapt, either his ordinary influences, or (if ever he thinks fit) his extraordinary interpositions, to their operations, agreeably to the nature Himself hath given them. There is, indeed, something not easy to be otherwise accounted for, not only in those sudden turns of thought and changes of resolution in the common affairs of life, which yet are often found to have been of no small importance to the persons concerned, but also in the advances sometimes made, and discoveries struck out, by studious men; in ways not less surprising to themselves than to others: as, if (which was once said of king Saul) *God gave them another heart* (1 Sam. x. 9.) on such occasions. But, without entering farther into a subject, which it may be neither easy nor needful to explain, I shall leave with you the remarkable words of Elihu: *God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not: in a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men; in slumberings upon a bed: then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction*. (Job, xxxiii. 14, 15, 16.)

May I not add, that the same seriousness of thought, the same abstraction from secular cares, and fixedness of attention to an invisible object, which acts of devotion require, must be proportionably serviceable in the contemplation of abstracted truths, and the acquisition of mental accomplishments? And, as the regular exertion of such acts must naturally tend to render those qualifications habitual, may it not be supposed to have a like tendency (besides procuring the assistance we implore) to qualify us for investigating the more abstruse points of science? Any excellency therein being known to call for all that disengaged composure of soul and steadiness of application, to which our minds can be worked up in the prosecution of them.

But, what might perhaps better deserve a distinct illustration (would the time permit me to enlarge upon it), is the beneficial efficacy of the religious principle, in regard to the subsequent exercise and continued possession, as well as the first attainment, of this kind of erudition; or, in another view of the same thing, the folly and danger of a self-conceited neglect of God's blessing, not only as an hindrance to our improvement, but as a temptation to the abuse, and a fore-runner of the loss, of whatever eminence we may be permitted to arrive at, in that way. Let it suffice, then, just to intimate, how material a difference may, at least frequently, be observed, between the indolent scholar on one hand, and the pious student (though a proficient of only an equal, perhaps, lower, class) on the other. Should the former succeed (and I will not say, but that he may succeed), so far as to replenish his mind with uncommon treasures of learning, and to produce to public view many admired monuments of it; yet, while unrestrained by any such reflections as piety would suggest, how apt is he, like the vaunting *king of Babylon* (Isai. xxvi. 3.), to assume to himself the glory of all his mighty achievements, and, with a self-applauding consciousness, to survey those stately structures, which he has, with so much magnificence, been erecting! And, if he is not, like the same example of fallen pride, suddenly degraded from his boasted pre-eminence, and deplorably reduced even below the common level of man's understanding, how generally is he found applying his
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unsanctified knowledge to the purposes of ostentation, insolence towards inferiors, disdainful treatment of equals, opposition to authority, singularity, perhaps heresy, and at length infidelity? Whereas, *the wisdom, which is from above, is first pure, then peaceable.* (Jam. iii. 17.) That knowledge, which is the gift of God, in reward of diligent study, recommended by undissembled devotion and singleness of heart, is more modest in its application, more beneficial in its fruits. The man of real learning, if at the same time a man of rational piety, is always ready to employ his abilities, not in attacking decent order and established truth, but in defending and supporting them. He considers, that not only the extraordinary *manifestations of the spirit* (1 Cor. xii. 7.) in the infancy of Christianity, but the ordinary communications of grace in succeeding ages, were, and still are given, to every man to profit withal. If he, therefore, should be zealous of superior gifts, or be conscious of any capacity of excelling, he proposes, not to astonish mankind by some bold paradox, but to benefit them by sound doctrine. Not by *speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after him* (Acts xx. 30.); but, *with all lowliness and meekness, to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.* (Eph. iv. 2, 3.) In a word, he *seeks that he may excell*, not to the unsettling, but to the *edifying of the church.* (1 Cor. xiv. 12.) But I hasten,

III. To subjoin a few reflections suited to the subject, by way of conclusion from the whole.

And, first, If a devout frame of mind, habitually trusting in God, and on all occasions ready to look up to and acknowledge him, be of so much importance to the direction of our paths, then, a little time spent in the cultivation of this temper, by religious exercises, should not be grudged by any of the seekers after wisdom, as if it were thrown away or misemployed. Rather, surely, shall we, of this place in particular, consider it as one of the most valuable advantages which our present situation affords us, that, whilst it enables us to cultivate every branch of useful literature, at a distance from distracting cares about the accommodations of life, it invites us to *seek first the kingdom of God* (Matt. vi. 33.), and to recommend ourselves, and all our

studies, to him, each morning and evening, in the well-digested forms of truth and soberness, provided by our church. Many of you, I suppose, must shortly be called forth into a very different scene of things, where the same daily opportunities for public worship, that are here open to you, can but rarely be expected. And happy will it be for such among you as can no longer partake of these valuable privileges, if you transfer some resemblances of them into those smaller domestic societies, to which you may respectively belong. But happier, still, shall we all be, either here or elsewhere, if, by superadding to the devotions of the temple, or the family, those of the closet likewise, we contract an acquaintance, and maintain a constant intercourse, *with the Father and God of our lives*: by this means securing, as far as on this side heaven we can secure, that *perfect peace* (Isai. xxvi. 3.) and serenity of temper which he only enjoys, whose mind is stayed on God; and for which this world itself, with all its glories, can furnish out no equivalent.

Again: If God's direction and assistance be so necessary to the right ordering of our steps, and the happy issue of our undertakings, then let each of us, before we engage in any undertaking, at least of moment, not only implore his favour, but justify our hopes of it, by first assuring our hearts before him. For if, upon an upright inquiry into the nature of our schemes, and of our proposed methods of conducting them, *our heart condemn us not* (1 Joh. iii. 21.), we may then proceed with cheerfulness and activity, with humble confidence towards God, that he will either at present grant us our heart's desire, or, by providing some better thing for us, in his own good time, fulfil all our minds. But, *should our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things* (1 Joh. iii. 20.): and we may assure ourselves, that *there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel, against him.* (Prov. xxi. 30.) Nor will it avail us to *cry unto God with our mouths, or to acknowledge him with our tongues*, so long as we *regard iniquity in our hearts* (Psalm. lxi. 17, 18.): our prayers, instead of being favourably heard by him, will, in this case, themselves be turned into sin. *The sacrifice of the wicked, as such, is an abomination; how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind!* (Prov. xxi. 27.) In

In short; if we would *so ask as to receive*, we must first see that we *ask not amiss*. (Jam. iv. 3.) We must *wash our hands in innocency*, before we beg God's assistance, or expect that he should *prosper our handy-work*.

Lastly: If the direction of our paths and the success of our pursuits depend so little on our own understandings, rather so entirely on the providence of God, then, whatever our accomplishments or acquisitions may be, let us acknowledge him as the giver of them all: *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches* (Jer. ix. 23, 24.): but *let him that glorieth, glory in the Lord*. (1 Cor. i. 31.) The great apostle, St. Paul, conscious of the danger of being *exalted above measure* (2 Cor. xii. 7.), to which himself had been exposed, even by the abundance of the revelations imparted to him, almost every-where sets himself, with more than ordinary vehemence, to beat down the pride, the spiritual pride more especially, of his converts, by this, among other reflections, that all the advantages by which they differ from others (1 Cor. iv. 7.), were really derived from their common Lord; and were therefore arguments for caution and fearfulness, rather than just occasions for arrogance and presumption: and, *what hath any of us, that we did not receive?* the reputed favours of fortune, the endowments of nature, the rewards of industry, and the privileges of grace—are they not all gifts of God? Instead, then, of glorying, as if we had not received them, or setting at nought our brother because we suppose him to have received less than ourselves, let us carefully employ our several talents in the service of the Giver, and for the benefit of mankind; looking forward to that awful day, when our *great master shall come and reckon with us all* (Matt. xxv. 19.); when (in this sense also) *he that hath gathered much will find nothing over* (2 Cor. viii. 15.), nothing beyond what he must strictly account for; and he that hath gathered little, if he have but been diligent in improving that little, shall find no deficiency.

To conclude: We are passing through a world, of no great moment in itself, but in the consequences of our conduct in it of infinite importance to us; where we

find ourselves in the midst of snares not to be guarded against, and of difficulties not to be surmounted by any wisdom or strength of our own. In this strange land have the descendants of Adam (Gen. iii.) been doomed to sojourn, ever since our common parent was driven from paradise, for his distrust of God's direction, and his affectation of forbidden knowledge: and wretched indeed must the days of the years of this our pilgrimage have been, had not the same God, in judgment remembering mercy, found means to give us the comfort of his help again, and to stablish us with his free spirit (Psal. li. 12.): had he not granted us his word for a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our paths. (Psal. cxix. 105.) *Who, then, is among you, that feareth the Lord, yet at certain seasons walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God*. (Isai. l. 10.) And, if some of our fellow-travellers, neglecting this gracious offer from Heaven, will rather choose to kindle a fire of their own, and to compass themselves about with sparks; though, after wandering in the light of their fire and of the sparks that they have kindled, they can hope for nothing but to lie down in sorrow (Isai. l. 11.), let us, by accepting his guidance, give glory to the Lord our God, before he cause darkness, and before our feet stumble upon the dark mountains. (Jer. xiii. 16.) Let our ears, with grateful attention, hear his word behind us, saying, *This is the way, walk ye in it, when we turn to the right hand, and when we turn to the left* (Isa. xxx. 21.): or (in the language of my text) Let us, in all our ways, acknowledge him, and he shall direct our paths. He shall guide us with his counsel, and after that receive us to glory. (Psal. lxxiii. 24.)

S E R M O N VIII.

The Necessity of Watchfulness from the Uncertainty of Life.

MATTHEW, XXV. 13.

Watch therefore: for ye know neither the day nor the hour, wherein the Son of Man cometh.

WE have in this and the foregoing chapter, one of the last and longest, and, in many respects, most remarkable, discourses of our blessed Lord to his be-

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loved Apostles ; and my text in particular contains a piece of advice which he inculcates through the whole by repeated admonition and a variety of illustrations : a circumstance, which must itself recommend the advice to our regard ; especially since we know that, in this instance particularly, *what he said unto his Apostles he said unto all.* (Comp. Mark, xiii. 35.)

Now by *the coming of the Son of Man* may be understood, either that dreadful visitation of the Jewish people, which not long after ended in the destruction of their city and government ; or the second coming of our Lord to judge the whole world : and it is probable, from several allusions throughout, that he had both these great events in view. The former of them, however, though it may, like other historical facts, furnish us with many useful lessons of instruction, cannot now, as having been long since past, be to us an object of expectation or an occasion of watchfulness. And so far as the latter (I mean the general judgment) was certainly at our Lord's delivering this caution, and may be even now, at the distance of some ages, it has been usual, and cannot be improper in applying his reasoning and advice to ourselves, to substitute in its room, or rather to join with it, another event, equally important in its consequences, yet equally uncertain, as to the time of its approach. And such exactly is that of each man's death in particular : an event which, besides all other motives to constant watchfulness that it has in common with the general judgment, has this peculiarly awakening circumstance, that the time of it cannot, though that of the general judgment should, be very far from any of us.

From the words then, considered in this view, I am naturally led to treat upon preparation for death and judgment : a subject, supposed indeed to be so generally well understood, as to need to be but sparingly inculcated by the preacher, or however but slightly regarded by the hearer : but a subject in itself of the last importance to both ; and not the less so on account of the commonness of it. Want of consideration is, in fact, in most cases, a far more general hindrance to men's improvement here, and their salvation hereafter, than want of knowledge : and whoever surveys the

state of the world about him, will find cause to think, that the duty of watchfulness and preparation for the hour of death, however well-known, is yet by no means on that account unworthy of a place among our public exhortations.

And, that we may employ our meditations thereupon as usefully as may be at present, I shall take occasion, from my text, as above explained,

I. First, To represent to you the nature of watchfulness ; and to specify some principal ingredients in, and concomitants of, this duty ; and then,

II. Secondly, To enforce the necessity of the constant practice of this duty, from the uncertainty of our lives, and our ignorance of *the day or the hour where-in the Son of Man cometh.*

First, then : As to the nature of the duty here required ; if we consider watchfulness in general, and without reference to any particular event, it will imply, a sedate, thoughtful, and collected frame of mind ; a keeping the powers of the soul awake, and the light of reason and conscience (that candle of the Lord) constantly burning ; a being on our guard against treachery from within, and in a posture of defence against assaults from without : in short, a *keeping our hearts with all diligence* (Prov. iv. 23.), and (in the Apostle's expression) a *walking circumspectly ; not as fools* (Eph. v. 15.), without thought or caution, but with the care and exactness of wise men.

But that particular relation, which the watching in my text bears to our Lord's coming, requires that our thoughts should not only be kept awake and active, but have a special attention to that great event. Watching then, in this respect, must imply, an habitual remembrance and steady expectation of death and judgment ; a lively and awful sense of their superlatively important consequences to us ; and a proportionable care and solicitude, throughout our whole lives, to prepare ourselves for them.

In short ; the true Christian watchman must be constantly upon guard, always bearing in mind, that the present life is a state, not of rest and security but of duty and danger : that his continuance in this state can be but short, and that he is every moment liable to be discharged from it ; that, notwithstanding this, his behaviour in this short life, and

the posture his spiritual affairs are found in when his Lord comes to call him out of it, must determine his condition of happiness or misery to all eternity.

Not that by the duty of constant watching we are required to be every moment of our lives actually thinking of our Lord's coming, or even for the greatest part of them directly and formally preparing for it. The former is in itself impossible; and the latter would be incompatible with the general condition of mankind, and the several exhortations in Holy Scripture to industry in, and attention to, the business of our secular callings (Rom. xii. 11.). And to go no farther, than to the parable of which my text is the conclusion; we find, that a total exemption from slumbering, or from yielding to the calls for repairing our nature, is not expected as a necessary condition of our entering into the marriage; but only such an habitual frame of mind as shall be capable of speedily rousing and recollecting itself upon the most unexpected summons. For we read, *while the bridegroom tarried, they all, that is the wife as well as the foolish virgins, slumbered and slept* (Matt. xxv. 5, &c.): but then, the former, having timely provided themselves with oil for their lamps, could soon become ready, and were accordingly admitted; whereas the latter, having neglected to make such provision in due season, were forever excluded.

And thus much may suffice by way of description of watchfulness in general, and also as it particularly implies a state of preparedness for death and judgment. Indeed, since we cannot be in such a state without a life of obedience to all the commands of God; in order to give you a full account of the several branches of watchfulness and preparation, I should give you a catalogue of all the instances of duty we owe to God, our neighbour, and ourselves. An undertaking too comprehensive to be here engaged in. However, as Holy Scripture, and indeed the very import of the term, point out to us the dispositions and practices, which enter into the notion of watchfulness, or are closely connected with it; it may be proper to specify a few of

1. And the first that I shall mention is sobriety. We find watchfulness and sobriety almost constantly joined toge-

ther in the New Testament. Thus *be sober, be vigilant* (1 Peter, v. 8.), says St. Peter, and St. Paul, *let us watch and be sober* (1 Thess. v. 6.). Our blessed Lord has been particularly careful to inculcate the necessity of this habit of mind, and the danger of the contrary one: *Take heed* (says he) *that your hearts be not overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and so that day come upon you unawares* (Luke, xxi. 34.). And again, *But and if the servant shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to eat and to drink and to be drunken; the Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites* (Matt. xxiv. 48, &c.).

Had Scripture indeed been silent upon this point, yet experience and the very nature of things must convince us, what an irreconcilable opposition there is between intemperance on one hand, and such a frame of mind on the other, as can with any propriety be called watchfulness, especially when considered as preparative to our Lord's coming. *Fleshly lusts*, in the natural tendency, *war against the soul* (1 Peter, ii. 11.); and in proportion as we indulge and give strength to the former, we necessarily weaken, and at length destroy, the powers of the latter. This is true of all the powers of the mind; but is more eminently so of those, which are conversant about heaven and heavenly things. An habitual indulgence in sensual gratifications insensibly wears out the impressions of religion, and destroys that seriousness, that awful regard to the things of another world, which it above all things concerns us inviolably to maintain. The soul, in such a situation, is quite immersed, and as it were dissolved, in the pleasures of sense; and cannot so much as lift up its eyes unto heaven. And how amazing must the arrest of death be to any one in such circumstances! what an account will a servant thus surprised, be able to give to his Lord at his coming!

2. For the like reason industry is another qualification, if not necessarily implied in the notion of watchfulness, yet closely connected with it. It is Solomon's observation, that *slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep* (Prov. xix. 15.). Our faculties by disuse become indisposed and unfit

for action. And by God's just appointment a neglect to employ our powers either of body or mind is generally succeeded by an inability to use them to any good purpose. Accordingly our Blessed Lord (in the parable immediately following my text) represents the slothful servant as not only missing his reward, but as losing his talent itself. Hence by idleness we become not only useless but cumbersome to the community in which we live: we fall below the brute, and even the inanimate parts of the creation; which all, some way or other, answer the end of their being, and none of which can properly be termed, idle. By this we disturb the harmony, and break in upon the settled order, of the universe; whilst we neglect to fill up our place in it honourably and worthily. And need I observe what the consequence of this must be in another world? Is he fit to be transplanted into a kingdom of glory, and to shine as a star in the other world, who has been only a blemish and incumbrance of this? or rather, might we not have safely concluded, even without a revelation for it, that *the unprofitable servant* would be finally *cast into* that state of darkness to which his inactivity naturally as well as judicially leads (Matt. xxv. 30.)?

And if industry in a general view of it, as it relates to our character as men, be so necessary a branch of watchfulness; how much more so must it be in reference to our high calling as Christians? a calling which is indeed represented as an easy yoke, and a light burthen; and such it certainly is, either in comparison with any former institution of religion, or with the practice of sin; at least after some progress made in the offices of it. But a yoke and a burthen it is, notwithstanding; binding us to several duties, and subjecting us to several trials, arduous in themselves, and rendered still more difficult to us, by our indisposition, both natural and acquired, towards them. Even the pleasantness to be met with in a virtuous life does not (as indeed no true pleasantness can) consist in an entire freedom from action and employment. A religious life is a state of perpetual motion, of continued progression in virtue and holiness. We Christians are *a people under peculiar obligations to be zealous of good works* (Tit. ii. 14.): we are bound by all the ties of gratitude, and encouraged by all the assurances of suc-

cess, *to grow in grace* (2 Peter, iii. 18), *to go on unto perfection* (Heb. vi. 1.), *to abound in the work of the Lord* (1 Cor. xv. 58.). The difficulties of our Christian profession may be, and have been, misrepresented; but they need not be misrepresented in order to convince us, that we must have *our loins girt, as well as our lights burning* (Luke, xii. 35, 36.), if we would approve ourselves servants, that in earnest wait for their Lord.

3. This suggests to us another necessary branch of Christian watchfulness; I mean, heavenly-mindedness, or indifference to the concerns of this world in comparison with those of the other. I say, in comparison only: for whatever some retired ascetics, some over-strained enthusiasts, may pretend, whilst we live in this world it is not expected by him, who placed us here, that we should either seclude ourselves from it, or live wholly above it. But though we may commendably employ some part of our thoughts, some share of our industry, upon worldly things, and shall ordinarily find it our duty to do so; still we must be careful not to let our affection fix there. An affection for this world, and an acquiescence in the possessions of it, must be very inconsistent with that watchfulness, which implies a continual expectation of being called out of it. Our Blessed Lord, in a passage already hinted at, has in terms very remarkable to our present purpose, at once expressed the nature and criminal degree of worldly solicitude, its fatal influence upon our preparation for death, and our great proneness to be overtaken by it. *Take heed that your hearts be not overcharged with—the cares of this life; and so that day come upon you unawares* (Luke, xxi. 34.).

Unawares indeed that day must come upon the worldly-minded man; his chief good, his treasure, is on this side the grave; and he finds it necessary, in order to enjoy any tolerable quiet, to put far from him, and as much as possible to forget, that uncomfortable moment, which is to be the period of his happiness. And, *oh Death, if the remembrance of thee is so bitter* (Eccles. xli. 1.), how much more bitter must thy near approach be, to the man, who liveth at rest in his possessions! how unwelcome the summons to *arise and depart from this his rest*! (Mic. ii. 10.) how cutting the thought of pre-

fently taking leave of his beloved treasures! how like a snare must death needs come on all those that dwell, those (I mean) that in their hearts and their affections dwell, on the earth (Luke, xxi. 35.)?

4. But farther: As watchfulness denotes a state of readiness for our Lord's coming to reckon with us; this should suggest to us the great usefulness and necessity of frequent self-examination and reckoning with ourselves. This is indeed the best, the only way of providing against a fatal surprise at our last hour. Thus much is very strongly intimated in our Saviour's parables on the present subject, particularly that of the ten virgins, from which my text is directly inferred. Had the five foolish virgins frequently examined into the state of their lamps, they might have timely supplied them with oil; for want of which precaution, their lamps were gone out before they were aware; and whilst they vainly endeavoured to procure it, the door was shut, and they for ever debarred from an entrance to the marriage of the bridegroom.

To prevent any miscarriage in an affair of so high importance; the good servant, who in earnest waits for his master's coming, and desires to make suitable provision for his reception, will set his house in order, and have it swept and garnished: that is, he will from time to time impartially examine into the state of his own mind; what bad dispositions or habits he has by the gracious assistance of God's holy spirit subdued and banished from it, and what good ones he has introduced into it; how many of the former kind still remain to be weeded out, and how many of the latter to be planted and cultivated. He will examine carefully whether his practice has been conformable to his rule, and his improvements proportioned to his receivings: that so, like a faithful and wise steward, having his accounts regularly stated, having corrected what was amiss, and supplied what was deficient; he may, without anxiety wait for, and without confusion or terror enter upon, the awful day of reckoning; ready whensoever it shall come, to give up his accounts with joy; in humble confidence of receiving his Lord's approbation, and the reward of his own fidelity.

5. After all; one necessary concomitant of watchfulness still remains to be

mentioned, and that is, prayer. This is constantly joined with watching both in the exhortations of our Saviour and of his apostles; and must be as constantly joined with it in our practice, if we would have our own endeavours in any degree successful. It is a just observation, that "Prayer without watchfulness is mockery, and that watchfulness without prayer is presumption" (South, vol. vi.). Our spirit may be willing; and while the Spirit of God worketh together with it, we shall be more than conquerors over all temptations: but, without such assistance, our flesh will soon betray its own weakness, and we shall not be able to *watch with our Lord one hour*. St. Peter thought his own strength sufficient to carry him through with his Master in all his sufferings; and accordingly we find him in a very sanguine manner professing that *though he should die with him, he would not deny him in any wise* (Matt. xxvi.). He thought so; but his Master knew the contrary: and though he was pleased to *pray for his over-confident but well-intentioned disciple, that his faith might not totally fail* (Luke, xxii. 32.); yet he permitted him to experience the frailty of his unassisted resolutions: and has in him left us all a standing monument of the danger of trusting in our own strength; and a convincing evidence, that *except the Lord keep our innocence, the watchman* (in this sense also) *waketh but in vain* (Psalm. cxxvii. 1.).

Upon the whole: Would we keep ourselves in a state of constant readiness for our Lord's coming; we must, according to the Apostle's expression, *gird up the loins of our minds and be sober* (1 Pet. i. 13.); not permitting our intellectual powers to be enfeebled by luxury, or stupified by excess. Instead of this, we must be active and industrious in the improvement of our time and our talents; and especially careful in the great business of trimming our spiritual lamp. We must withdraw our affection, and (as much as our present situation will permit) our care and solicitude, from *things on the earth*, in order to fix them with less distraction and greater steadiness on *things above*. (Coloss. iii. 2.) We must frequently turn our eyes inward upon ourselves; examining carefully and conscientiously, what the state of our spiritual affairs is; how our accounts stand with

our Lord and Master; and whether, in fact, all things are in such a situation with us as we could venture to have them found in at that important season, which is to determine our happiness or misery for ever. *Praying always, that, whensoever that season shall come, we may* (by the succours of Divine Grace assisting our weakness, and supplying our wants) *be accounted worthy to escape all those things that shall then come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man!* (Luke, xxi. 36.)

Having thus endeavoured to describe the nature, and to point out some of the most eminent qualifications, of Christian watchfulness, particularly as preparative for death and judgment; I shall now proceed,

II. To enforce the necessity of preserving ourselves constantly in the state already described, from the reason here urged, the uncertainty of our lives.

This is indeed the point, to which both the caution in my text, and the parable from which it is deduced, seem especially applicable. The ten virgins, as far as appears, had no difference of opinion about the necessity of having their lamps trimmed for their attendance upon the bridegroom. But the difference, which gave five of them the character of wise, and five of them the denomination of foolish, appears to have been this: the former considered, that the coming of the bridegroom was, as to the time of it, very uncertain; and might, without previous care on their part, find them unprovided: *they* therefore took such a supply of oil in their vessels with their lamps (Matt. xxv. 4.), as that these lamps might upon the most sudden call be presently trimmed. Whereas the latter took their lamps, indeed, but took no oil with them (Matt. xxv. 3.); they were either unconcerned and thoughtless about the matter, or persuaded themselves they should have such notice of the bridegroom's approach, as that any deficiency in preparing themselves might safely be made up. In short, the former resolved to do immediately, the latter contented themselves with intending to do some time afterwards, what both knew was, sooner or later, necessary to be done.

And is not this, in fact, the very circumstance, which distinguisheth the wise from the foolish in the great business of preparing for the hour of death? That

it is necessary to be found in a proper state of readiness, upon that most awful occasion, is a point which (I suppose) no Christian can seriously dispute. But then, *says the fool in his heart, "My Lord delayeth his coming* (Matt. xxiv. 48.): I have health and strength sufficient for years yet to come: I have hitherto had no intimations of any decay of constitution: and, surely, my gracious Master will either give me notice of his approach, or excuse any such want of preparation as want of notice may have occasioned. What need then of so much haste in providing, what may be provided at more leisure some time hereafter?"

Our Saviour, therefore, who well knew what was in man, that he might at once make allowances for the unavoidable infirmities of our nature and inadvertencies of our condition, and yet guard us against presumption in habitual sloth and security, represents all the ten virgins as *slumbering and sleeping, while the bridegroom tarried* (Matt. xxv. 5.). When therefore at midnight a cry was made, *Behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him* (Matt. xxv. 6.); we may suppose, the wise as well as the foolish were a little surprised and startled. But then they were not, like these latter, wholly unprepared: their lamps were soon trimmed; because they had oil before-hand provided: and so, being ready, *they went in with the bridegroom to the marriage* (Matt. xxv. 10.). But the success of the foolish virgins was very different: these had neglected to lay in a provision of oil before the cry was made, and there was not time both to buy and to employ it after: for, we find, though they used great activity and dispatch for that purpose at last, their endeavours then proved too late: *the door was shut* (Matt. xxv. 10.) before their return; nor could their most importunate entreaties for admission procure them any other answer than—*Verily I say unto you, I know you not* (Matt. xxv. 12.)!

You see, the point, inculcated throughout the parable, is the necessity of constant watchfulness: not indeed a total exemption from slumberings and weaknesses of our nature, but such an habitual frame and temper of mind as shall speedily rouse and recollect itself upon the shortest warning. And the reasons here intimated are,—the uncertainty we are

always

always under as to the time of our being called out of this world; and the certainty of the exclusion of all such from eternal happiness (that marriage-feast of the Lamb) who shall be found unprepared at that time. The former of which reasons is expressed, as the latter is implied, in this conclusion drawn from the whole parable; *Watch therefore: for ye know neither the day nor the hour, wherein the Son of Man cometh.*

And can these reasons want any labour-ed proof of their truth; or can we want any long enforcement of the use here deduced from them? Were mankind in general those reasonable creatures they pretend to be, it is certain, neither proof nor enforcement, in a case at once so clear and so momentous, could be necessary. But alas! the solicitations of sense and appetite so frequently, I had almost said so universally, prevail against the dictates of those much nobler faculties, reason and conscience, that you must permit me, not so much by way of instruction as of exhortation, to enlarge farther upon the well-known, but much-neglected, particulars above-mentioned.

As to the former, the uncertainty we are under about the day or the hour of our respective deaths, I am at a loss how to set about an illustration of it. If we do but give ourselves leave to think at all, we can scarce miss of observing the curious frame and contexture of our bodies; how inclinable they are in themselves to decay and dissolution; how liable to diseases from within, and accidents from without; and how numerous those diseases, those accidents, are. Or, if such reflections should escape us, it is scarce possible we should continue for any time in such a world as this, without being continually reminded of the same thing by *the thousand which fall beside us, and the ten thousand at our right hand* (Psal. xci. 1.).

The truth is, the uncertainty of human life is matter of universal observation, and almost universal complaint. But our misfortune is, that while we all own this in general, each of us neglects to bring home the important, but unwelcome, truth to himself; as if each of us had literally made a covenant with death, and were at agreement with the grave (Isai. xxviii. 15.). Strange infatuation this! and not be exceeded or equalled by any other, but that of acknowledging the un-

certainty of life, even of our own life, in theory, and yet at the same time denying it in practice, by neglecting to make the only proper provision against any inconvenience from it.

Which neglect must appear (if possible) still more unaccountable, if it be considered, that our lives are in God's hand, depending not on (what we call) mere accidents, but on his good pleasure. *If he taketh away our breath, if he do but cease to give it, we die*, and our mortal part is turned to dust (Psal. civ. 29.). And can we think ourselves in any degree entitled to his protection, whilst we voluntarily renounce all claim to it by repeated acts, by a continued course, of rebellion against him? Can we presume upon his forbearance, when that forbearance is likely to have no other effect upon us, than that of giving us both opportunity and encouragement to abuse it. Bad men have certainly of all others the greatest reason to expect to be cut off in the midst of their days (Psal. lv. 23.): and that servant, who presumptuously saith in his heart, "*My Lord delayeth his coming,*" is most commonly, as well as most justly, surprised in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour which he is not aware of (Matt. xxiv. 48, 50.).

To-day, then, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts! to-day, whilst it is called to-day (Heb. iii. 15.)! Boast not yourselves of the morrow; for ye know not what a day, what an hour, may bring forth (Prov. xxvii. 1.). Say not to any of God's messengers calling and inviting thee to repentance, "*Go and come again, and to-morrow I will give;*" when thou hast it by thee (Prov. iii. 28.). The morrow, thou reliest upon, may never be in thy power; or if it should, thou mayest not have by thee the heart to set about the necessary work, or the ability to go through it. Say not to thine own conscience, *reasoning with thee of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come,* "*Go thy way for this time: when I shall have a convenient season I will call for thee*" (Acts, xxiv. 25.). For why must the friendly monitor go away for this time? another convenient season may never be offered thee: undoubtedly, not a more convenient one than the present.

For, art thou grown old in the service of sin? Certainly thou of all men hast the worst plea for shifting of the indispensable

work. The youngest sinner has no more than a pretence for delay; but, alas! thou hast not so much as a pretence, or even shadow of pretence, for it. Thou hast no hopes left but from that mercy, which thou hast already long abused. To this therefore instantly betake thyself, with deep self-abasement, and sincere penitence, fleeing for refuge to his all-sufficient merits, who *came into the world to save sinners*. Thy case, though deplorable, we hope is not yet desperate: *escape for thy life*, therefore, *neither say thou in all the plain* (Gen. xix. 17.): for, shouldest thou yet linger, know assuredly, that inevitable evil is ready to overtake thee.

Or, art thou yet within the years of confirmed manhood? The time past of thy life may surely suffice to have wrought the will of thine impure lusts: a fitter opportunity can never be expected for reasoning thyself, and asserting thy freedom, from such a slavery. Thy reason is now at its full strength: let it then have its perfect work: at least let it have as perfect a work in thine everlasting concerns, as thou art careful to allow it in matters of infinitely lighter moment: and if in these latter thou art willing to let slip no fair occasion, no gainful offer, be as wise, as just to thyself, in securing the incomparably more valuable, and if once lost more irretrievable, interests of thine immortal soul. Nay,

Once more: Art thou yet in the bloom and vigour of youth? Why, *now is the accepted time*: thy soul is now most clear of the pollution of actual sin, most free from the tyranny of evil habits: thou art now most at liberty to *remember thy Creator*; and thy remembrance of him now will be most pleasing to him. Whereas, shouldest thou neglect the present season, though another should be allowed (which yet is far from being certain, or even likely), thy passions will be more and more untractable, and thy vicious inclinations more importunate; and thou wilt find it, in all respects, more difficult *to do good*, after having been *accustomed to do evil*. (Jer. xiii. 23.)

We grant it possible for thee not to die suddenly. Thou mayest be spared to old age; or thou mayest have warning given of thy approaching dissolution by the gradual advances of it: instances, we own, may be produced of persons, per-

haps as wicked as thyself, who have gone to their graves without any remarkable distinction, in point of untimeliness, from men of much better character. And, what has been the case of others, may possibly be thine. Nor shall we refuse thee the praise of that wisdom, which is, in other cases, allowed to those who needlessly hazard their all upon a bare possibility. Supposing, however, this were not only possible, but probable; nay, and that it should, in the end, prove actually thy case: consider, what it is thou hast to depend on, even then. Why, it is, that thou shalt be both willing and able to repent in old age, or upon a dying bed: that is, that thou shalt have inclination to set about, and strength to go through, one of the most irksome and difficult tasks in nature, a task, indeed, by mere nature impracticable—an entire change of heart and affections: that, after innumerable acts of disobedience and unfaithfulness, after numberless mercies abused, and talents misemployed, thou shalt, notwithstanding, make thyself ready for an interview with thy Lord, and for an entrance into his joy! And all this, at a time when infirmity or sickness shall have rendered thee unequal to the ordinary employments of this life! And now, my brethren, think, what it must be, on presumption of a bare possibility, a possibility too clogged with such circumstances, knowingly to continue in a state of unpreparedness for our last hour! A state, in which, should that hour overtake us, we are sure not only to lose an eternal weight of glory, but to be miserable for ever! I say it again, for ever! that is, not for a few days, or weeks, or years, no, nor millions of ages; but for a duration endless and unmeasurable even in thought; and which, when all these portions of time shall be past and gone, will be no nearer to its conclusion than it now is. I am at a loss for a name for such a proceeding. Folly, or even madness, must become sounds without meaning, should they pretend to convey any just conception of it.

May we all, then, be persuaded, immediately, and without delay, to put ourselves in a watchful posture, a state of readiness for that awful event, which may be near, and cannot be far from any of us. May no temptation of youth or health betray us into sloth, or harden us in licentiousness: especially, if any of us

us have already dozed away too much of our time in unprofitableness, or misemployed it in sinful pursuits. May we now, at least, *awake out of sleep* (Eph. v. 14.), and (in the Apostle's language) *arise from the dead*; that *Christ may give us light*! We know not at what hour the master of the house may come; whether at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning of life. (Mark xxx. 35.) But this we know, and to know this should be sufficient at once to awaken and encourage our vigilance, that *blessed are those servants, whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching* (Luke, xii. 37.).

S E R M O N IX.

Importance of Religion to Civil Societies.

GENESIS, XX. II.

And Abraham said, Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake.

THAT the general belief and public acknowledgment of those great principles of religion, the being of a God and his providence, are necessary to secure the order and happiness of civil societies, is an opinion confirmed by the united suffrage of the thinking part of mankind in all former ages. Not only the advocates for religion, after having established its truth, generally insist on its importance to men's social interests; but its very enemies have been forced to give us such accounts of its original and propagation, as plainly imply a confession, that the belief of it has always been thought necessary, to deceive mankind into a compliance with the rules of virtue, and a participation of the benefits of society.

This opinion, however, while suffered to keep possession, must needs be a considerable prejudice against all attempts in favour of irreligion. Accordingly, some of those, who, in this age of doubting, have discovered an inclination less favourable to religion, and every thing related to it, have (consistently enough) endeavoured to remove this obstruction. Hence, as it should seem, we have been entertained with calculations of the effects of theism, scepticism, and even atheism, upon moral goodness: and the same per-

sons, who have pleaded for subjecting the most sacred truths to the test of raillery and ridicule, have also proposed it as a problem, whether an atheist may not possibly be a man of virtue and merit? shewing a willingness at least to answer it in the affirmative. And, should speculations of this kind be thought harmless amusements only of refined and contemplative heads, yet our own observation, I fear, may but too fully convince us, that something more than amusement has been the consequence of them. Unconcernedness about religious principles, in general, seems to have been for some time succeeding into the place of (what used to be accounted) a just abhorrence of infidelity and atheism. Our late pretenders to free-thinking, have, indeed, for the most part, chosen avowedly to attack revealed religion only; and even in such their attempts the interests of the public may perhaps be found by no means slightly concerned. But it is well known also, that the arguments they have generally employed for that purpose, are calculated to carry their deluded followers still farther. And there is great cause to believe, that those persons, whom such cavils are sufficient to remove from the faith of the gospel, very rarely stop short of a disbelief of, at least an indifference towards, all religion whatsoever.

It is therefore become but too seasonable, and will not, I trust, be thought wholly improper on this public and solemn occasion, to reconsider the subject above-mentioned: to inquire, whether the general acknowledgment and influence of religious principles be really of so much importance to secure the morals and good order, and (which I will here suppose to be connected with these) the happiness, of societies, as has been commonly imagined? That, if it should, upon inquiry, appear to be so, we may reflect, before it be too late, what consequences may be justly apprehended, should a disregard for religion and things sacred make any farther advances amongst us.

The reasoning of the Patriarch in the text is, on many accounts, remarkable to the present purpose. Abraham appears, from this history of him (the antiquity of which, at least, our adversaries must give us leave to insist on) to have been one of the most illustrious personages in ancient times. By sojourning in several different countries,

countries, he had opportunities of making himself acquainted with the manners and sentiments of several different kinds of people; and this too at a time, when the condition of mankind approached much nearer, than it has since done, to that state of nature, with which some late writers would be thought to be so familiarly conversant. And what was the result of the observations of a person so well qualified to make them with advantage? Why; that the fear of God is the only effectual check upon men's lusts and passions; and that, where any country is supposed destitute of the influences of this principle, there is no immorality, no villany, no barbarity, which may not justly there be dreaded. This was the conclusion which the Patriarch drew from his acquaintance with mankind. From this he reasoned, and upon this he acted, as an unquestionable truth. *And Abraham said, Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake.*

The fear of God, to which Abraham here supposed the people of Gerar to be strangers, must be understood to be the same principle by which himself was actuated, and concerning which he had been, in an eminent manner, taught of God. We have, indeed, all the proof that such an affair will admit of, that the religion of all nations, when traced up to its original, was revealed. But it is evident, that the religion of Abraham was directly and immediately such. It will not, then, seem foreign to the import of my text, if occasion be taken from thence to represent to you, not only,

I. First, The importance of religious principles in general to national virtue and happiness; but,

II. Secondly, The excellency of those of revealed religion in particular to this purpose; and then,

III. Thirdly, Some of those useful inferences that most naturally result from the foregoing considerations.

I. First, then: The importance of religion to morality may be illustrated two ways: by inquiring, whether, on the supposition of no religion, there could be, in reason, any proper obligation to moral virtue? Or, whether, on the same supposition, there would be, in fact, any effectual inducement to it?

It will be little to our present purpose,

to consider this point in the former view. Whatever be determined concerning any supposed obliging power of moral considerations, separately from those of religion, yet the order and happiness of societies, I mean, as far as the natural tendency of things is concerned, are immediately affected, not by what men's behaviour ought to be, but by what it is in fact found to be. The most useful method of treating this point, therefore, seems to be to inquire, not how men's obligations, but how their actions, will be influenced by religion, or by the want of it. The inquiry is, by this means, brought from the bar of abstract reasoning to the more obvious and more convincing decision of fact and experience: and from considering, what has been hitherto observed concerning human nature, we shall be best able to judge, what may, at all times hereafter, in the same circumstances, be expected from it.

But here we meet with very different accounts, even among those who seem agreed in slighting the provisions of religion. If we will believe some great pretenders to a deep insight into these matters, man is a being by nature wild, unsociable, suspicious, treacherous, malevolent. Others, perhaps out of an abhorrence of such a view of human nature, have given us representations of it very different from the foregoing one, and in some respects from those of each other: whilst some of them speak of man as if he were nothing but pure intelligence, solely conducted by truth and rectitude; and others, as if he were all good affection, sufficiently actuated by kind instincts, and a love of virtue, for virtue's sake.

The truth, I conceive, lies between the two opinions, which I will venture to call extremes. Human nature is neither so base and odious a thing as the one would make us believe; nor will experience justify the flattering accounts given us of it by the other. Every good-natured man feels the injuriousness of the former representation: and we need go no farther than to such solemnities as these for a full confutation of the latter.

Man, considered in the views of mere philosophy (and in that manner only the persons we are here contending with will permit us to consider him), may be allowed to be by nature endowed with such faculties as direct, and such dispositions as incline,

incline, him to associate with those of his own species; and to be, as by the former enabled, so by the latter excited, to promote the happiness of such associations, when made. But then it must be remembered, that these faculties, these dispositions, as far as they are natural to man, are faculties and dispositions only. To reduce them to acts, there must be willingness and choice; but to improve them into habits, care and cultivation are farther necessary. And, after all, should our discerning faculties prove liable to be obscured and perverted by powers of a different tendency, and our social affections to be checked and restrained by others of a private nature: it is plain, if we sit down contented with surveying only the bright side of human nature, and from contemplating what such a creature may be, conclude what he generally will be, we shall frame a very partial conception concerning that nature, and may find ourselves much disappointed in our expectations from it.

The suppositions I have been just hinting, are by no means merely imaginary. Let us leave our speculations, and follow man into common life, and we shall soon find each of them but too sadly verified. The first appearance that will offer itself to our view, may probably be that of the most useful faculties weakened, and the most generous affections overpowered, by craving appetites, impetuous lusts, and head-strong passions; and (which is still worse) perverted, and rendered subservient to purposes most prejudicial to public welfare. The avarice and ambition of some, the peevishness and resentfulness of others, the lasciviousness and lusts of still more, meeting with the like propensities in other men, would soon, if permitted to operate according to their natural tendencies, render this world a scene of confusion, distraction, and desolation. Man, when under the dominion of his passions, has ever been observed to be one of the most dangerous, most destructive, of creatures. Even those very powers, which, when rightly applied, give him a just pre-eminence over the whole animal creation, serve only, under such a perverse management, to render him more artful in contriving, and more successful in accomplishing, the most mischievous designs.

What is it then, which, at present, re-

strains mankind from these ravages, this destruction of each other? This is an inquiry, about which those persons are particularly concerned to give us some satisfaction, who imagine they can sufficiently provide for the government of the moral world (as some of their forefathers pretended to have done with regard to the natural), without taking into their schemes the belief of a God, and a providence. And a variety of expedients will, no doubt, be assigned for this purpose. Great stress will be laid on the powers of reason; greater, still, on the more active principle of benevolence: and mighty things will, by others, be ascribed to a sense of honour: whilst those, who give us the most disadvantageous accounts of human nature, refer us, for a sufficient security of our persons and properties, to the dread of the civil magistrate. Let us see, then, what might ordinarily be expected from any or all of these, should we be prevailed on to part with (what we have been used to account the foundation and support of each of them) the fear of God.

Reason, as far as it is a part of our nature, has already been observed to be a faculty only; and must, to make it serve to any good purpose, be carefully cultivated, and regularly employed. Give me leave, then, for once, to suppose this faculty to be thus cultivated, thus employed, without either setting out in its inquiries with a sense of religion, or arriving at the discovery in the progress of them. And what will be the result with regard to societies? Why, we are to expect many curious disquisitions upon the nature of a system; upon the proportion which the parts of such system bear to the whole; and, in short, upon the reasonableness, that each member of a community should refer his aims and pursuits, and even sacrifice his private advantage, to the general good. But, to speak freely, whatever may be said for a member of society's sacrificing his own private interests to those of the public, this must (I suppose) be understood of such private interests only, as make no part of his ultimate happiness. For sure it must ever be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to persuade any man, at least on the foot of reason, to give up his own final interests for any consideration whatsoever. Whereas, without the supposition of a Deity, every good

good we are possessed of may be our ultimate good; every interest we can forego may prove our final interest. What a damp then must atheism, or even scepticism, cast upon all generous sentiments! How heavily must all public designs proceed, when the conductors of them have not in all their thoughts that Being, who alone can, in case of present interference, bid self-love and social be finally the same.

But, in truth, we need not stay to inquire, what our rational faculties would direct, on the supposition before us. If the united ties of reason and religion, are so unable to confine men possessed with the legion of disorderly affections, as we too often find them to be, how easily would men break the bonds of reason only in sunder! With how little concern would they cast away its cords from them! Indeed, who would, in this case, think it worth while to collect the dictates, or to hearken to the voice, of reason? Men that can be contented to *have no hope, to be without God in the world* (Eph. ii. 12.), must have anticipated the insensibility they expect for their final portion; or, however, they will, in course, soon abandon the care of the rational, and deliver themselves up to a merely animal, life. Why should a man take much fruitless pains, to increase his sorrow by increasing his knowledge; or to cultivate a faculty, the improvement of which could, at best, serve only to render him more ingenious in disquieting himself in vain?

The truth is briefly this: The faculty of reason, when regularly consulted and faithfully followed, will always lead us to the acknowledgment of a Deity, and own itself to be his gift, *who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven* (Job, xxxv. 11.); and, when it does this, it comes most strongly recommended to our care and cultivation, our attention and reverence. But if, either out of laziness, men stop short of, or out of vicious prejudice exclude, or out of self-sufficiency affect an independence upon, the great principles of religion; the dictates of reason become uncertain and precarious; reason loses its dignity, its authority, and becomes a faculty, in every view, wholly unaccountable.

Benevolence is indeed a principle of a more active nature, and may perhaps be

thought capable of supplying the deficiencies of reason with regard to social happiness. Not to enter into any dispute concerning the origin of benevolent affection; let us suppose it to be as natural and as universal, as is sometimes contended. Yet surely we need not prove, that men have other affections, equally natural and universal, and at least equally important for their respective gratifications. And whensoever the gratification of the former should interfere with that of these latter, as it frequently would in reality, and more frequently in appearance, we may appeal to experience to determine for us, what the result would generally be, were men actuated by no farther views, no higher principle. Or (which I would observe here once for all) should some few be disposed to hearken to the still small voice of nature in favour of the public; such a disposition could serve only to render its owners a more easy prey to the force or fraud of an infinitely greater number.

How unfriendly a disbelief of the principles of religion must be to public spirit, in the accounts of reason, has been already intimated: but the influence it would have directly and immediately on men's pursuits, and their very tempers, would probably be much more so. The active part of mankind would naturally put themselves under the conduct of the selfish and overbearing passions: whilst the more sedentary would deliver themselves up to gloom and melancholy, to spleen and fullness. And how ill must every generous affection thrive in such a soil! We are surprised and shocked at the ingratitude and insolence of a *Nabal* (see Sam. xxv.) to his benefactor, applying for relief under the humble, and at the same time endearing, appellation of his son David. But all this is fully accounted for, when we read, that he was a *man of Belial*; insensible of the obligations, and a stranger to the comforts, of religion; and no wonder, then, if deaf also to all the demands of humanity.

With what different sentiments does a sense of religion inspire us towards our fellow-creatures! That we have all one father: that our interests are alike in the hands of a most wise, most gracious being! What calmness must such reflections speak to our breasts: what cheerfulness must that diffuse over our conduct towards those
around

around us! Our gloomy thoughts, our melancholy apprehensions, are all now dispelled. Here is room and encouragement for every generous affection. Conscious of being continually under such a protection, we are no longer anxious about our private concerns; we can allow those of the public a just share in our regards. *None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth unto himself.* (Rom. xiv. 7.)

Honour, considered as a principle of action, consists in a sense of the dignity of our nature, and a resolution at all hazards to act up to it. An habit of mind, which, when conducted by reason, and supported by religion, will ever produce excellent fruits, and can hardly be too much encouraged: but, when it takes (as without religion it ever will take) popular and prevailing notions for the standard of what is agreeable to a man's dignity or character; this same habit of mind becomes a most capricious, and may be a most hurtful, principle: nor is there, in fact, any thing so ridiculous, or so destructive of public order, which our men of honour will not easily be reconciled to the commission of, nay, challenge applause for. So precarious will the morals, as well as the *faith*, of those persons always be found, *who receive honour one of another, and not the honour that cometh from God only.* (John, v. 44.)

And what is here observed with regard to particular persons, is equally observable of societies. We read of some nations, even in the heathen world, of whom many excellent things are related, as proceeding from a principle of honour and bravery of mind. But, upon inquiry, it will appear, that the beneficial effects of this principle, if not the prevalence of the principle itself, always kept pace with the regard paid to religion. No sooner did any such nation fall into a *dislike to retain God in their knowledge* (Rom. i. 28.), but we find them presently given up to a reprobate mind, to do [*τὰ μὲν κακόνοντα*] things least agreeable to, most unworthy of, their nature.

The truth is, religion affords the only rational foundation for a sense of honour. If man be supposed, with regard to his whole being (and something like this the atheist, if he thinks at all, must suppose), *to come up like a flower, and be cut down again*, like a vegetable to blossom and flourish for a little while, and then to de-

cay, wither, and sink into the ground from which he sprung: if he be supposed to come into this world by chance; to sojourn in it for a few years, as in a strange land; continually reminded of his defenceless condition, and not conscious of any superior protection; and, after a dull round of objects, which himself cannot relish, and of employments which he cannot but despise, to drop into nothing, as if he had never been! need I ask, what dignity there is in such a composition as this? No, certainly. We must be excused from expecting any great assistance to morality, any considerable services to the public, from the honour of those persons, who own themselves to be of such an extraction, and are able to give us no better account, whence they come, or whither they are going.

Civil government was the last expedient above-mentioned for securing mankind against the ill effects of each other's appetites and passions: and an expedient it undoubtedly is most beneficial, indeed in man's present state absolutely necessary, for that purpose. But it is as certain, that civil government always has called in the assistance of religion; and, in the nature of things, always must do so.

I insist not here on the atheist's giving us a satisfactory account of the first formation of civil societies; or on his clearing up the many suppositions he must make previously to that of any constitution of government at all. Let us suppose, with him (without being too scrupulously inquisitive after the time, place, manner, motives, &c.), that a great majority, as the governed in every society must be, not insisting on their natural equality, have agreed to subject themselves to one, or at most a few, of their brethren. We ask, then, What shall secure, to the governed, the beneficial exercise of the power they have conveyed; and, to the governors, the firmness and continuance of the conveyance?—What shall engage the several members of the community to contribute their respective shares to the public weal? And, in short, what shall render government, in every respect, a real and general blessing?

We have seen, how insufficient the faculty of reason, and the principles of benevolence or honour, will always, of themselves, be in particular persons, to withstand

stand the force of appetite and passion: and, we may well suppose, the addition of power will hardly diminish the force of those appetites and passions, which it gives an opportunity of gratifying. Exaltation and dominion have been always observed to be of an intoxicating nature. And, though government, under the most disadvantageous circumstances, may seem preferable to anarchy, yet governors, conscious of being armed with power, and not conscious of any superior being, from whom they derive, and to whom they are accountable for it, might render a nation sufficiently miserable: nor is there much room to hope, that they who fear not God would, in such a situation, regard man.

Let us, however, suppose the governing part of the society, from whatever principle, heartily disposed to promote its welfare and prosperity; yet, how shall they be secure of being supported in their authority? Or, without such security, how shall they proceed with a proper vigour in accomplishing the good ends of it? If a number of men be supposed to have devolved so much power, upon one or a few of their equals, as is requisite for their protection and the promotion of their interests; we need not doubt but they will think themselves at liberty, at least, to resume that power, whensoever they do not, or (which will be a much more common case) whensoever they imagine they do not, reap the advantages expected from it. And, whilst every little disappointment, every trivial grievance, every wanton desire of change, shall, by those who will be at once parties and judges in this case, be improved into a sufficient reason for insurrection and rebellion; how precarious must be the tenure by which any prince can hold his authority! How weak the hands of a good prince, in exerting it to any beneficial purpose! How vain must it be to expect, that those persons, who fear not God, should, on any steady principle, honour the king!

But, supposing the relative obligations of governors and governed regularly adjusted, and all the security given of a mutual concurrence for the public good, that can well be imagined, still it remains to be considered, how the good ends of government itself shall be pursued and accomplished? I would, on this occasion particularly, specify two of these ends;

that of determining differences, which shall arise about property; and that of guarding the members of the community against mutual invasions, by properly applying penal sanctions. Now the dispensers of justice must, in many, if not all, cases of both kinds, determine upon such evidence as can be had only from the testimony of others: and yet, what security can they have of the veracity of such testimony, but upon a presumption, that the persons who give it are under the awe of a Being, from whom no secrets are hid? Without this presumption, courts of judicature cannot take one step with any satisfaction or assurance: an oath can give no security, can have no sense in it; and all judicial processes must become idle pomp, and trifling with solemnity.

Add to all this, that many practices, of a tendency very prejudicial to public welfare, are yet of such a nature, as exposes them not to the censure of human laws: the greatest crimes may often be transacted so secretly as to escape the knowledge, and the greatest criminals may sometimes be so numerous, or so powerful, as to defy the resentment, of the magistrate. In all these cases, and many others, civil government must ever be unable to punish, and therefore also insufficient to restrain.

In short, without religion, it is hard to say what foundation there could be for any such mutual confidence among men, as is necessary to the support of government, the very being of society. Without supposing each other under the influence of this principle, every man might too justly be in perpetual fear of every other, who should be either stronger or more subtle than himself; so long as the one could think himself possessed of any thing, which the other might think it worth while to invade; or so long as the other could be supposed to have either lust or appetite, revenge, or even wantonness, to be gratified by infesting him. The apprehension that *every one, who should meet him would slay him* (Gen. iv. 14.), must in this state of things be the melancholy portion of every son of Adam; and all mankind might join in the complaint, *My punishment is greater than I can bear!* (Gen. iv. 13.)

But *the Lord is king, the earth may be glad thereof!* (Psalm. xcvi. 1.) When we take into our account the general acknowledgment of a God, a Providence, a fu-

a future state; the face of the moral world is changed: society becomes practicable, and government a blessing. Where religious principles prevail, good kings may reign with security to themselves, and benefit to their people. Subordinate magistrates will know themselves to be under the strongest obligation, the most powerful engagement, to decree justice: and may proceed in doing so with cheerfulness, whilst those who give them information, or evidence, or verdict, are presumed to give it *in truth and righteousness, as seeing him who is invisible*. The peaceable and inoffensive subject will have all the security with regard to his person and property, that either a sense of an Almighty protection in his own breast, or the supposed awe of an Almighty vengeance in the breasts of other men, can possibly give him. Whilst those, who are disposed to be contentious and injurious, must, to come at the properties of others, break loose from all the ties of interest as well as conscience: they must, by giving disturbance to society, expose themselves not only to the wrath of the magistrate, but to a more inevitable, more dreadful, indignation: they must give up their own most valuable interests, before they can allow themselves to invade those of other men; and become, in the strictest sense, fools, in order to be knaves.

Upon the whole; the remedies we have been considering are certainly, in conjunction with the fear of God, of no small benefit to societies. But, should we once set aside the supports and enforcements of religion, we should soon experience the insufficiency of all other preservatives of public order and happiness, and find reason to lament our having parted with the only effectual restraint upon those lusts and passions, *from whence come wars and fightings, confusion, and every evil work*. A restraint of universal extent, and only not irresistible efficacy, the influence whereof reaches to every relation, every office, of life; which, like the great object of it, *is about our bed and about our path*; which follows us into the closest recesses, and *meets us in every thought*: a restraint, to the powerfulness of which the libertine and the atheist loudly bear testimony; the former, by making it his avowed quarrel with religion, and the latter, his boasted triumph upon a pretended conquest over it; but a

restraint, to which we must have leave to glory in our professed subjection, as well knowing, that it debars us of no liberty but such as is destructive of public as well as private happiness; that it maintains the just authority of those parts only (both in the political system without us, and the moral one within us) which are fitted to govern; and requires the subordination of those only which are fitted to obey: and a restraint therefore, which we consider not as the invader, but as the guardian, of both social and personal freedom.

After all, I must not dissemble a material exception to what has been offered. The effects of a religious principle will, in course, depend much on the notions men entertain concerning the object of it. Thus, if the nature of the Deity be uncertain, or his will unknown, a morality consisting in an imitation of that nature, and an obedience to that will, must become imperfect and precarious in proportion. But, should the Deity be conceived to be a capricious and weak Being, much more, an example and patron of treachery, debauchery, cruelty, &c.; such a corrupt religion (though in some respects preferable to no religion at all) must have an influence but little favourable to the morals of its professors, or the interests of society.

How far the religion of the Gentile world is affected by this exception, those among ourselves who appear solicitous to reduce us to it, might do well to consider. In the mean time (blessed be God!) we Christians are prepared to give a full answer to it. And, for this purpose, I proceed to represent to you,

II. Secondly, The excellency of revealed religion in particular, for securing and promoting national virtue and happiness.

Not that I here presume to do justice to a subject so extensive; nor will any laboured illustration of it, I hope, be thought necessary: only, in reference to the foregoing suggestion, I cannot but observe, that our holy religion constantly sets forth the God, whom we fear, at once in the most amiable, and the most awful, light: in his own nature, as a pure spirit (Joh. iv. 24.), every where present (Psalm. cxxxix. 1—12.), having *all things naked and open to his view* (Heb. iv. 13.); *glorious in holiness* (Exod. xv. 11.), infinitely

finitely removed from all imperfection, all possibility of being so much as *tempted with evil* (Jam. i. 13.) : in the exercise of his power, as *gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness* (Joel, ii. 13.) ; yet as *by no means willing to clear the guilty* (Exod. xxxiv. 7.) : in his providence over states and kingdoms, as making their prosperity or adversity more visibly correspond with their piety or impiety : and towards all mankind in their private capacity, as having *appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness* (Acts, xvii. 31.) : a day, in which he will completely rectify all the seeming irregularities in his present distributions ; and *render to every man his final allotment of everlasting happiness or eternal misery, according to his deeds.* (Rom. ii. 6.) The truth is, every reason already given for the importance of religion in general to societies, has been an anticipation of the proof of the excellency of that religion, which alone, with any certainty, represents its adorable object as uniformly and unchangeably holy, and just, and good.

And, as revelation has furnished us with such excellent accounts of the Divine Nature, so has it made us, not less usefully, acquainted with our own. That the principles of our composition are at variance with each other, has been already supposed, and is too manifest from experience : but in the sacred writings alone we read the first occasion of this *war between the law in our members and the law of our minds* (Rom. vii. 23, 24.) ; which the natural man could no more account for, than he could deliver himself from it. And, as we here learn the true source, so here we are directed to the proper cure, of our degeneracy. Here every part of our nature that deserves to be strengthened, receives assistance, direction, and encouragement ; at the same time that every corrupt and pernicious tendency is brought under all the discipline and restraint, that can be proper for, or indeed consistent with, our rational nature.

Is reason a faculty fitted to contribute any thing towards national virtue and happiness ? But where do we find the native pre-eminence, the divine original, of this faculty so fully discovered ; where its views so enlarged ; where its genuine dictates recommended by so high an autho-

rity, or enforced by such powerful sanctions, as in the revelation vouchsafed us of his will, *who is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things ?* (1 Joh. iii. 20.) Is benevolence a principle in any degree beneficial to civil societies ? Let the Deist tell us, where every affection of the generous kind is so described in its properties, so exalted in its principle, so extended in its influence, so incited by examples, so animated by rewards, as in that holy commandment, that divine institution, *the end of which is charity ?* (1 Tim. i. 5.) Is a sense of honour productive of any good effects to the public ? the same revelation (Gen. i. 26, 27.) presents us with the most rational foundation for this principle, the only satisfactory account of the original dignity of our nature : and, when that dignity was in great measure lost, here, and here only, we learn, what extraordinary methods have been, and still are, taken by every Person in the ever-blessed Trinity, for advancing each part of our composition to yet greater dignity than that from which we fell. And, lastly, Is civil government an expedient necessary to preserve the order and happiness of mankind ? But never was its origin explained ; never its powers guarded from abuse on one hand, and from insult on the other ; never its several good ends provided for, in so summary, so certain, and so authoritative, a way, as by revelation ; which informs us, without any tedious deduction, that *the powers that be, are ordained of God ; that rulers are the ministers of God for good ; and that we must needs be subject to them, not only for wrath but also for conscience sake.* (Rom. xiii. 1. 4, 5.)

But still more eminently does the excellency of our religion, and its usefulness to societies, display itself, in removing the chief cause of social as well as personal disorder ; not by an idle attempt to extirpate our affections, but by first purifying and exalting them, and then placing before them objects most worthy of their pursuit. Are societies disturbed, and the foundations of the political world put out of course, by men's intruding into the province, and impertinently censuring the conduct, of their superiors ? Christianity calls home men's misapplied concern, bidding them *study to be quiet and to do their own business.* (1 Thess. iv. 11.) Are men's endeavours for the benefit of others

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and the service of the public, checked and restrained by an attention to private interest? Christianity alone has effectually, and against all casualities, reconciled these interfering tendencies: it has placed our kindness to others at once on the most generous and most rational foundation; teaching us to desire no present returns for our good offices, yet assuring us of an abundant recompense at the resurrection of the just. Are revengefulness and litigiousness productive of any ills to societies? *This wisdom which is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated: it banishes that love of the world, and that pride of life, which make our competitions degenerate into quarrels; which give keenness to our resentments, and continuance to our enmity: it forbids not a due care for our temporal interests, nor debars us of any fair methods of recovering them when invaded; but, by extending our prospect into a far better country, and engaging our hopes and our hearts upon the treasures of that place, it scarce leaves room for a temptation to fall out with our brethren by the way; to enter into any great warmth, or to cherish any lasting hatred, on the account of any thing in this world.*

From such an institution what assistance and encouragement must not morality receive? how friendly must it needs be, in its natural tendency, to the interests of civil societies? What could a lover of mankind more ardently wish for, than that such a religion should be every where received, every where obeyed?—But I hasten to suggest to you,

III. Thirdly and lastly, Some of those inferences which seem naturally to result from the foregoing considerations. And,

First, From what has been said it is obvious to infer, that magistrates and all that are intrusted with the care of public order and happiness are, for that very end, highly concerned to support and encourage religion.

And here, by religion I understand, not only the internal belief of a God and a providence, together with such affections of love, reverence, trust, &c. as that belief tends naturally to produce; but also those outward expressions of both in acts of social worship, by which I will presume a society of reasonable creatures, sensible of many common wants to be supplied, many common calamities to be

averted, many common benefits to be acknowledged, would conclude it necessary to apply to their common Creator and Governor. That religion in the former sense, however it may be in its principle a personal matter, will ever in its effects greatly affect societies, has already appeared. But I would here observe farther, that even personal religion never did, never will, generally or considerably prevail, where some public profession of it is not regularly kept up; where the members of a community are not frequently called together to recognize the authority of the Supreme Being, and to confirm their awful sense of his power, majesty, and goodness, by devout expressions of it: nor indeed can there well be a foundation for mutual trust and confidence among the members of a society, without some visible worship of Almighty God; by attending whereupon they may give each other satisfaction of their being under the influence of the same common principle. In short, both the internal principle and the external profession of religion are necessary, not only as branches of our duty to God, but to secure the natural good ends of religion to civil societies. For the promotion and support of each, therefore, every prudent as well as pious magistracy will think itself concerned to make a competent provision.

I must not stop here. It has been already intimated, how much the morals of a people may, and must suffer, from a corrupt religion, from unworthy notions or impure worship, of the Deity. Every reason, therefore, which can be given for the magistrate's supporting and encouraging any religion, will plead for his distinguished favour to such a religion, and such only, as is in its representations of the Divine Being, and of the methods of applying to him, pure and holy; and in its precepts and general tendency at once beneficial to the social and personal interests of mankind. How fully the Christian religion comes recommended to favour under each of these characters, even separately from that far superior title to reverence, which its divine original gives it, I need not now stay to illustrate. Let me only add, that, if among the several denominations of Christians, there be one, which has preserved the due medium, in its discipline, between tyranny and persecution on one hand, and licentiousness

and anarchy on the other; in its doctrines, between such claims of infallibility as preclude all private judgment, and such latitude as would render a revelation insignificant for the purpose of a rule of faith; in its worship, between superstitious and idolatrous pomp, and a neglect of decency and order: if, in its professed principles, it be best fitted to promote public peace and happiness, and, in its external polity, best adapted to the form of the civil constitution: and if, over and above all these, it be in other respects most conformable to the original standard, and to the usages of the best and purest ages of Christianity: such a society of Christians (we trust) will ever recommend itself to a wise and religious prince, as worthy of his first, and always his chief care. And we acknowledge it, with humble gratitude to Almighty God, and with all due thankfulness to those whom he hath set over us, that we, of the church of England, can with pleasure make the application.—But,

Secondly: We may farther infer, that all attempts to remove the influences of religion, or to set men loose from a sense of its sacred obligations, may be considered as so many attempts against public order and happiness, and be justly resented as such by the guardians of it.

I would not here be understood as desiring by this inference to subject all those to the magistrate's resentment, who may not, by the foregoing one, be recommended to his especial favour. The subject before us leads me not to consider the case of a conscientious separation from the communion favoured by public wisdom; nor yet of such an opposition to the terms of that communion, as is consistent with public peace, and the inviolable regard due to religion in general, and to so excellent a religion as the Christian in particular. Thus much, indeed, is certain; that a wise government, jealous of all advances towards irreligion, will ever have a watchful eye upon all such disputes as, either on account of the matters debated, or the manner of debating them, appear to have a tendency that way. The case, however, which I have principally in view, is that of opposition, not to particular forms of church communion or establishments, under the acknowledgment of the same divine revelation; but to all church-communion, all

establishments, all revealed religion; and yet, more especially, that of attempting to rob a nation of all sense of any religion, or (which amounts to the same thing) to deprive them of a religion, the good effects of which they have long experienced, without leaving them any determinate one to supply its place. This is an attempt directly and immediately affecting the public welfare, and incapable of alleviation from any plea, either of conscience or charity; and is an attempt, therefore, against which every government is concerned to express a *perfect hatred, and to count the authors* (what indeed they are) *its own worst enemies.* (Psal. cxxxix. 22.)

The resentment here pleaded for will (no doubt) be called persecution, by those who are forward to deserve, but unwilling to suffer, it. Let it, however, be called persecution for unrighteousness, for blasphemy, for avowed atheism; and for such persecution (if a defence of every thing sacred must be so called) no good man need be ashamed to plead. No man complains of the execution of the laws against robbers, perjured persons, murderers, &c. And, whether they who break one of these commandments, or they who teach men so—who remove from them the only effectual restraint from the worst of villanies, by instructing them to be under no apprehension of guilt, nor in cases of secrecy of any after-punishment, are more heinously criminal in themselves, or more extensively injurious to the public, can surely be no difficult matter to determine. But,

Thirdly: I beg leave to infer, that those persons, who have voluntarily dedicated themselves to the office of explaining and inculcating the great principles of religion, and have devoted their time and their labours to a continual attendance on this service, may reasonably expect to be considered, regarded, and supported, as useful members of the community.

Men may declaim plausibly upon the self-sufficiency of that reason which is common to all: it may be said, that the doctrines and duties of natural religion are, in every body's hands, those of revealed religion also, must be clearly discoverable by reason. And this kind of flattery will always be most greedily swallowed by

those who are least entitled to it. But (to consider this matter impartially), by what reason are these things so clearly discoverable? Not, surely, by the reason of children, either in age or in understanding: but, by reason regularly cultivated, faithfully consulted, and as faithfully followed. And of how small a part of mankind such reason as this will ordinarily be the portion, let experience determine. In fact, information and instruction are necessary to give mankind, in general, a proper acquaintance with those truths, which are of the utmost consequence to them. And even after the *good seed of the word is sown, and has taken root, the cares of this world, the numerous concerns, about which the greatest part of mankind ever have suffered, ever will suffer, their time and their thoughts to be almost wholly engaged, would soon choke it, and render it unfruitful*; were not the same watchful care employed in a continual cultivation of it. To speak freely; that a considerable part of our species does not degenerate into barbarians and savages, is in great measure owing to some such stated returns of attendance on the public worship of Almighty God, and of hearing his word explained and enforced, as we of this nation (happy, if we could but be made sensible of our happiness) enjoy. By the labours of a standing order of preachers (a privilege unknown to the Gentile world) *the bread from heaven falls, as it were, among our tents, even round about our habitation*. And, if we take into the account the more familiar methods of instructing the young and ignorant, advising the dissident, reproving the froward, encouraging the well-disposed, speaking satisfaction to the scrupulous, relief to the desponding, and peace to the departing soul; these are offices, which (it is hoped) will not fail to conciliate the friendship of every lover of mankind, to an order of men so usefully employed; if not on account of their divine institution, at least for their work's sake.

There is one consideration farther, which I take leave to mention under this article, and at this time. We have heard much of late of the spreading of popery in this kingdom; and it is a report, which cannot be received without concern by any lover of his country or his holy religion. But to what can it be ap-

pearance be more probably ascribed, than to those suspicions and jealousies, which the more unlearned part of the laity have been taught to entertain for their proper pastors, the parochial clergy? He must be a stranger among us, who knows not, what extravagant writings have of late years been published, and with what assiduity they have been dispersed; reproaching not only some scandals to the order, but the whole order in general; as mercenary and designing, as aiming at nothing but dominion and wealth, and as prosecuting an interest not only distinct from, but opposite to, that of the rest of mankind. As to the justness of these general and undistinguishing accusations, the world must judge between us. But, methinks, patriots so watchful should consider, when by such repeated invectives the people are worked up into a dislike and hatred of those, to whom not only the laws of Christ, but the laws of the land, direct them to apply in cases of doubt and difficulty; how almost unavoidably they must either throw off all regard for religion, or fall an easy and willing prey to those who lie in wait to deceive; to those bold undertakers, especially, who are always at hand, ready to offer them a safe conduct, and to recommend their own delusive attempts with an appearance of great disinterestedness, and extraordinary sanctity. What numbers, especially among the unlearned and unstable, have been in this manner reconciled to the Romish communion, it is not perhaps easy to say. But thus much, I presume, we may collect (if any thing can be collected) from the experience of past times: that if ever popery is effectually kept out of this kingdom, this must be done, not by throwing down the fences of our present happy establishment, nor by alienating the affections of the people from those, who are appointed to guard them from delusion (methods which must ever give the Romanists, as indeed they ever have given them, the advantages they most wish for against us), but by a steady adherence to that ecclesiastical constitution, which has always been the glory, and has, on many occasions, proved itself to be the bulwark, of the reformation.

In short; if the interests of societies be at all concerned in the prevalence of religion in general, or the happiness of this nation in that of reformed religion in par-

ticular; it is as certain, that the credit and beneficial effects of both these are closely connected with the reputation and influence of the persons, that are appointed to teach them. A consideration, which must ever plead for a suitable regard and support to those teachers; as it is undoubtedly a most powerful engagement upon persons, in a situation of so great consequence, to *take heed unto themselves*. (1 Tim. iv. 16.) But to return:

The inference before us is manifestly extended, in the reason of it, to places set apart for training up the youth and growing hopes of the nation in the useful, the necessary, principles of virtue and religion. This indeed seems on all hands so well understood, as to need no illustration. The reproaches of them that reproach our excellent religion constantly fall on these societies, so happily formed for making early and successful impressions in favour of it: and as they are honoured with the same enemies, so (blessed be God) they can boast the same friends. The protection with which we are favoured with regard to our ancient privileges, and the encouragement given to our public works, are such honourable testimonies in our favour, as we acknowledge in all places with all thankfulness.—May these illustrious seminaries always enjoy the friendship of the public! as, I trust, they will ever continue to deserve it, by making the cultivation of learning and loyalty, of honour and virtue, and (for the sake of every thing amiable and praise-worthy) of the fear of God, their constant care.

Lastly, and to conclude: Let us all, as we would approve ourselves not only faithful servants of God, but hearty friends to our country, give all diligence, first to fix in our own minds, and then, as our stations and influence shall enable us, to propagate in the minds of others, a just sense of the truth as well as importance of our most holy religion.

Hitherto you have heard our religion recommended as of importance to the order and happiness of civil societies: and we hope, in this view, it appears entitled to protection and patronage from all that are in authority. But I must not conclude without observing, that we can go much farther in our recommendation of it. We solicit not the favour of the

great, or the protection of the powerful, from any distrust of our cause. The advocates for our faith have produced many convincing proofs, I doubt not to call them demonstrations, of its truth and certainty—such demonstrations as the nature of the subject will admit of, and such as are incomparably superior to those we scruple not to reason and act upon in any other part of conduct. And, if our religion be true (as most unquestionably it is), we are infinitely concerned to remember, that the consequences of our receiving and obeying it, how important soever they may be to us in our social capacity, are, with regard to our personal capacity, inconceivably more so: they will follow us into that world, where civil societies shall have no being; and will determine our condition in a state endless and unchangeable.

May we all then, from a rational conviction of the truth, and a constant sense of the obligations, of our holy religion, carefully and conscientiously discharge our respective duties in our several stations, *as to the Lord, and not to men*.—So shall the work of our country prosper in our hands, and we shall derive upon it the *blessedness of a people who have the Lord for their God*. (Psal. cxliv. 14.) And when all these associations, to which we here stand related, shall be dissolved, when *every one of us shall give an account of himself to God* (Rom. xiv. 12.); strips of all these marks of distinction which the ends of government now make necessary, such a diligent improvement, and religious application, of our talents, to the glory of our Creator and the good of mankind, shall, through the merits of our Redeemer, secure to each of us the gracious sentence from our merciful Judge,—*Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord* (Matt. xxv. 21.)

S E R M O N X.

The Condition of Man's Life a constant Call to Industry.

JOHN, ix. 4.

I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

WHAT is the cause, that the former days were better than these? was long ago censured as an unwise inquiry: and I will not say, that there would be at present either more pertinency in the same question, or more justice in the complaint implied in it. Yet, how rash soever it might be, to pronounce peremptorily concerning the comparative goodness of different ages or countries upon the whole; we shall, I presume, in view of their prevailing modes of thinking or acting, find room enough for distinguishing them from each other. And, to bring this reflection nearer to ourselves; if our own age and country may, (as I hope it justly may,) claim some advantage on account of the fashionable exertion of a few really amiable qualities; its proper character, I fear, will be found yet more strongly marked by others of a less reputable kind: such as, a love of ease, and fondness for sensual pleasure; an aversion from serious thought, and impatience of almost any useful employment. A taste this, which hath for some time been spreading, not among the gay and sprightly alone, but even among the grave and sedentary (I had almost said, the studious) part of the nation. For otherwise, whence comes it, that the writers of the times so generally find it expedient to accommodate to this not only the entertainment, but the instruction, they are pleased to provide for us? In fact, diversion is become at least one principal business, and skill therein an important branch of science, in our days. A general relaxation in principle hath been gradually introducing a proportionable carelessness in practice: till, from a sceptical unconcern about the future, we are but too naturally sunk into a most unmanly self-indulgence for the present. What we shall do in the end hereof, is a

serious inquiry; and would deserve to be as seriously considered; were it not already too probably resolved; by wretchedness, disorders, and tumults in the country; by decay, murmurings, and complainings in the city; by unsuccessful enterprises and other mortifying occurrences abroad; I wish we could not add by (those constant concomitants of expensive pleasures) corruption, greediness of gain, and want of feeling for the public, almost every-where at home. But, leaving effects of this sort to be estimated by others; it may concern us to consider, what might be the consequences of indulging a like trifling, indolent, luxurious humour in places of education, and even among the sons of the prophets. Now, wisdom is not born with any of us; nor is it to be acquired, where it most abounds, without attentive observation, and painful search for it as for hid treasure: and if, from a general disuse of such necessary means of improvement, *these lights that are among us* should become darkness, how great must be that darkness! if, instead of aspiring after skill in ancient languages, and acquaintance with ancient customs; after readiness in the art of right reasoning, and acuteness in detecting fallacious pretences to it; after depth in useful sciences, and above all an early knowledge of the Holy Scriptures—the younger attendants upon the instructions here offered should sit down contented with accomplishments far more easily attainable: the original records of our holy religion will in proportion be neglected; its evidences will lose much of their clearness and efficacy; its genuine doctrines and primitive polity will be misunderstood; the obligations it lays upon its professors to unity in faith and communion in worship will be little attended to; whence advantage will be taken, on one hand to strain them too far by those, who charge us with apostasy; and to explain them quite away on the other by those, who envy us the privileges of our establishment. And, if ever those well-tried principles, upon which, while studied and understood, our national church hath been most successfully defended, and hath hitherto been an impregnable bulwark of the reformation, should be laid aside and forgotten; sound learning and useful science, and with them real virtue and rational piety,

would (I am persuaded) soon give way to barbarism and superstition:—that superstition most probably, against which we profess to entertain the warmest zeal; and against which our zeal cannot well be too warm, if it be but exerted according to knowledge.

Let me not here be misunderstood, as arrogantly accusing, where I only mean affectionately to caution. Sensible I am, that sober industry, pursuing its object in silence and solitude, is not always sufficiently careful to *let its light so shine before men, that they may see its good works*: whilst the undaunted worthlessness of a few that are otherwise cannot be hid; because they themselves will needs be *proclaiming their own folly to every one they meet, as they walk by the way*. (Eccl. x. 3.) Never, I believe, were totally vicious characters less frequent in this place than at present. Yet, how happily soever we may have hitherto *escaped the pollutions that are in the world*, it cannot be unreasonable to guard against the infection of its levities and follies: nor will it (I trust) be thought a blameable attempt, if I take occasion, in a still more general view, to propose a modest application of the resolution in my text, with a serious enforcement of the reasons on which it is founded.—*I must work the work of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.*

Not to detain you with any unnecessary enlargement upon the occasion of these words, or their relation to the context; it may be proper just to observe, that they are the declaration of our blessed Lord himself: and as he was, in a peculiar manner, sanctified and sent into the world, in order to perform such works in it *as none other man did, or could do*; we are obliged to acknowledge concerning this his declaration, in its highest sense, that *never man spake like this man*. However, since he is pleased to argue from principles in which we are all of us concerned, we have the less reason to think ourselves unconcerned in the use he makes of them. Something, no doubt, there was, not only in the end of our Lord's mission, and in the nature of his works, but in the perfection of his whole character, far beyond the reach of our highest attainments. And if, notwithstanding this, we are exhorted to *walk as he walked*; if, in particular, he hath by his meekness in suffer-

ing left us an example; well may we encourage one another *to follow his steps, who went about doing good*, by a like assiduity in working the works of him that hath sent us also: especially since it is certain, that upon us too the night is coming, when none of us will longer be able to work.

The words thus applied, easily resolve themselves into the following observations.—That we are all sent into life by Almighty God:—that he sent us to work, not to be idle, in it:—that our activity must be regularly exerted in working his works:—that for these he allows us a day, or short space of time only:—and that, therefore, while this lasteth, we are concerned to make the best use of it we can; lest night overtake us, before our task be finished,—which well-known truths I need only wish I could recommend to your attentive recollection, by considerations in any measure suited to their real and universal importance.—But let us proceed to particulars. And,

I. We are sent into life by Almighty God: we were not born at all adventures; we grow not up by accident; nor are we, during our abode here, at our own disposal.

That we are sent, is itself an awful thought: and the observation, how trite soever, may yet, I suppose, bear to be inculcated. For, whilst perhaps no-body doubts of it, who is there that duly attends to, or properly applies, it? Who is there that considers life as a trust committed to him; and is not rather solicitous to find out some artful expedient for passing the tedious hours along with least trouble, than studious to employ them with most advantage? Nay, even of those who, under the wise direction of others, have happily contracted an early liking for business; or who, from afterwards observing the reputation and other conveniences attending it (motives very proper as far as they go), make it their choice to be employed rather than wholly idle; how few are there who work because they are sent; preferring a life of action upon a principle of conscience and fidelity to him that sends them?

Yet such is the case, and such ought to be the sentiments, of every one of us. That it is God who hath made us, and *we ourselves*, is an assertion not the less worthy of attention, because by daily re-

petition rendered familiar to us. Or, if we will needs have it, that we were at first produced, and have since grown up, according to stated laws of nature, as they are called; yet the most received philosophy would teach us, that these laws are his laws, and that subordinate agents perpetually derive from him all their efficiency. The oracles of God constantly speak in the same language. They ascribe our *make and formation to Jehovah's hands*. (Ps. cxix. 73.) *His eyes did see our substance yet being imperfect, and in his book were all our members written*. (Ps. cxxxix. 16.) Had not these day by day been fashioned by his unerring care, as hidden, untimely births we had not been; or, had not he, in this sense also, caused the light to shine out of darkness, the day of understanding had never dawned, nor its day-star arisen in our hearts. To him likewise we owe the preservation as well as the first grant of our being, and all our faculties: through him have we been holden up ever since we were born; and by him alone we escape death. Nay he challengeth to himself not only the regular productions in our species, but even the seeming deviations from his own plan. *Who hath made man's mouth?* (Exod. iv. 11.) saith he to his servant Moses; *or who maketh the dumb or deaf, the seeing or the blind? have not I, the Lord?* And whatever wise reasons there may be (as wise reasons, no doubt, there are) for those immature births, imperfect formations, or untimely deaths, that are often permitted to fall under our notice; one important purpose they certainly will serve, if they serve to remind us, that birth, perfection of parts, growth and maturity, are not things of course, or such as depend solely upon uncontrolled natural causes; but are ultimately resolvable into his good-pleasure, by whom we were at first fearfully and wonderfully made; who continually holdeth our souls in life; *nay in whom we live, and move, and have our being*.

We are not, therefore, our own: we received our existence from God, *the God of the spirits of all flesh*; and on him we depend for every moment's continuance of it. And, as our time is in his hand, so is our management of every portion of it noted in his book. He, who entrusts us with this and all our talents, will assuredly one day come and reckon with us. Our whole frame and

constitution; that freedom of agency, with which we feel ourselves endued; that progressive state, whereof we are conscious; that apprehension we naturally have of a superior observer; above all, the notices given us by our judge himself; in short, all things within, all things without us, conspire in proclaiming, that we must give an account of ourselves to him that sent us.—What account will be expected, might have been deduced from the foregoing reflections, though my text had not so clearly implied.

II. That we are sent into life, not to sit still only, or to take our pastime therein; but to work and be industrious, in order to our being useful in it.

For, if we are sent hither by a Being of infinite wisdom, our errand, we may be sure, must not only be worthy of his own perfections, but suited to the powers he hath given us, and the situation in which he hath placed us. In particular: do we find ourselves in a world, where every species of creatures about us is incessantly fulfilling our common Creator's word? We cannot imagine, that he should intend or allow us to be the only idle and unserviceable parts of his creation: much less can we suppose him, after preparing us bodies admirably fitted for action and use, to leave us at liberty to apply these exquisite pieces of workmanship either to no use, or to such as is even worse than none: least of all would he have *taught us more than the beasts of the earth, and made us wiser than the fowls of heaven*, for no other end, but that such superior endowments should be lost in an insignificant round of *sitting down to eat and to drink, and then rising up to play*. And yet, of all this he hath given us still farther intimation, by having made action and exercise not only the ordinary means of improving our several powers, but a necessary condition of retaining them; by having placed no valuable acquisition within the reach of the lazy or the negligent; and (which may deserve some farther illustration) by having exempted no season of life, no situation in society, no state of human nature itself, from every sort of engagement.

No season of life can be wholly excused from business. Confirmed manhood is indeed that portion of it, in which the faculties, whether of body or mind, usually appear to be at their best estate:

this, therefore, is most fitted for such undertakings as require a strenuous exertion of the one or the other; and a dreadful account must they have to give, by whom this important part of life hath been vilely cast away in inglorious ease and sensuality. However, this, though the principal, is by no means the only season for labour and action: inactivity, even in childhood, is unnatural; and, if youth must generally be spent in preparing for the offices of maturer age, such preparatory exercises are themselves works of no small pains and assiduity, as well as of indispensable necessity to render the remaining stages of the man's journey through life, either beneficial to his fellow-travellers, or even supportable to himself. Nay, as to more advanced years; neither can these be absolutely discharged from attending upon services of the gentler, but not less useful, kind: so long as the ignorance of youth shall need instruction, and its impetuosity restraint; or so long as the operations of man's estate shall want to be directed, and sometimes also its rashness to be moderated, by sober advice and friendly reprehension: in which respects, since men of virtue and piety shall bring forth more fruit in their age; even grey hairs must claim no dispensation for unprofitableness; so long as the mind itself retains any capacity for thus beneficially employing the result of its long experience and observation.

Neither can any station or circumstances in society give a release from employment.—With regard to the greatest part of mankind, the point is evident: *these must in the sweat of their faces eat their bread.* And as to those few in comparison, whose accommodation is more amply provided for; they also must, if they will preserve their innocence and virtue, or even their health and relish for any other blessing, engage in some occupation, or contrive some exercise, for that purpose; it being so ordered, in our very constitution, that, *if any person will not work, neither shall he eat.* And yet, surely, fit occasions for working can nowhere be wanting, any more than obligations to embrace them. The management of a plentiful fortune, and the demands of an exalted station, themselves call for no ordinary degree of vigilance or activity; and where

works of necessity are least pressing, works of piety and humanity, of friendship and charity, will not fail the more strongly to solicit us. *The poor we have always with us;* and they, whose time lies most upon their hands, whensoever they will, may always commendably, and methinks agreeably, employ it in doing them good. To all which let me add, what men of affluence and dignity are much concerned to bear in mind, that their examples will be active, should they themselves be idle; or, at least, that their lives, how trifling soever they may now be, will one day be found to have no small weight in increasing their condemnation.

Nay, once more: no condition of human nature ever was, ever will be, exempt from every kind of working.—Even the state of innocence was by no means a state of inactivity. The fall of our first parents introduced toil and drudgery into our world, but found industry already in it: for the dressing of the garden was, we know, Adam's business, though not his painful labour. And if after death *there remaineth a rest for the people of God;* even this rest is not a freedom from action, but only from sin and its never-failing attendants, weariness and pain. From such labours they, that die in the Lord, shall then rest: but the works of contemplation and love, of adoration and praise, shall so follow them as for ever to make a part of their exercise and their happiness. In short: in whatever capacity we view human nature; whether in its original perfection, or its present degeneracy; whether in its present state of discipline, or its future state of glory; we may pronounce concerning idleness (what was long ago said of pride) that it was not made for man.

Where it needful or proper to dwell longer on so beaten a topic, this despicable vice might be exposed in every view, in which it can be considered, whether natural, moral, or religious: as it debaseth our nature, and sinks us below our rank in the scale of beings: as it renders useless, and by degrees extinguisheth, every good quality in us; whilst it supplies nourishment and incentives to every bad one: as it indisposeth us towards every duty, and lays us open to almost every temptation: as it resists the wise purpose of Providence in this world;

world; and, in the next, not only cuts off all title to any inheritance, but finally subjects us to the tremendous doom of the unprofitable servant. If even an heathen historian could learn from nature to count that man's existence alone worthy of the name of living or vital enjoyment, who is engaged in some useful art, some undertaking capable of transmitting his fame to after-times; shall we, Christians, stand here all the day idle, as if no one had hired us; we, who are bought with a price of inestimable value, and who are, as such, under peculiar obligations to glorify God in our body and in our spirit; both which are God's?

However, after all, it is not expected that every moment of men's lives should be thus employed. Neither the texture of our bodies, nor the frame of our minds, will endure to be perpetually upon the stretch. Without seasonable intervals of relaxation, we must soon become incapable of working: and, notwithstanding all our care, occasions there will be, either of bodily indisposition, or discomposure of mind, or both; when (as we humbly hope) he, who knoweth whereof we are made, will not be strict to mark our involuntary intermissions, nor severe in calling us to account for them. But then, these very deductions, from our time, must greatly enhance the value of the remainder. The more of our precious moments have been, or may be, sunk in the needful refreshment of our wearied limbs, or the no less needful recreation of our exhausted spirits, the fewer can be spared for unnecessary amusements; and the more strictly are we obliged to improve to advantage those that may be yet in our power. In this sense, also, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. (Eph. v. 16.)

On the other hand, neither will every kind of employment be allowed in our accounts, much less be admitted as rewardable. Many busy-bodies there are, who (2 Thess. iii. 11.), in the estimation of an inspired Apostle, work not at all, to any good purpose: such, in particular, are tattlers and talebearers, especially in the censorious way; impertinent meddlers in other men's matters, to the neglect of their own concerns; movers of sedition in communities, and sowers of discord among brethren. And if activity thus employed can neither be acceptable unto God nor approved of

men, still less so, if possible, must be the mischievous pains taken, in corrupting the principles, and debauching the morals, of youth, by factors for the enemy of mankind, and companions of that destroyer: these, and such as these, far from being owned by our Lord as having been engaged in his service, will finally be dismissed into outer darkness, with, I know you not: depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity! Which brings me to observe,

III. That we must not only be active, but our activity must be rightly directed, and regularly exerted: we must work the works of him that sent us.

And should it now be asked, in the words of the Jews to our blessed Lord, what shall we do, that we might work the works of God? (Joh. vi. 28.) I conceive, the general answer may well include all lawful occupations, all such as minister to the necessities, without providing for the lusts, hurting the persons, or injuring the properties, of ourselves or others; especially if they are undertaken with an habitual purpose of serving our Creator by them, and carried on in ways conformable to his laws. Secular employments, thus consecrated, become not only allowable means of subsistence, but rewardable instances of duty. Indeed, without these, cannot a city be inhabited, nor the state of the world maintained. (Ecclus. xxxvii. 32. 34.) So long, therefore, as men prosecute them in their due order, and in methods consistent with higher obligations, so long are they commendably answering his intention, who sends them hither: and, by parity of reason, those liberal arts and learned professions, by which persons of more extensive knowledge are rendered more extensively serviceable in their generations, may justly be presumed to be well-pleasing to God, inasmuch as they are good and profitable unto men.

True, indeed, it is, that Christianity hath greatly enlarged and exalted our views. Yet even this divine institution, which hath directed our affection to things above, hath not tied up our hands from things on the earth. It permitted, if not required, those, to whom it first offered itself, to abide in the same callings, wherein they were called. (Cor. vii. 20.) Nay, we find this among St. Paul's instructions to Titus, and in him to succeeding governors of the church, let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not

not unfruitful. (Titus, iii. 14.) When *he that stole* is, by the same Apostle, admonished to *steal no more* (Eph. iv. 28.), instead of being advised to fly from the temptations, by going out of the world, he is directed to prevent or disarm them by provident labour, *working with his hands the thing that is good.* Safely, therefore, may we Christians reckon worldly employments, so long as they are lawful ones, among those good works, *which God hath ordained that we should walk in them.* And they, that walk in them through life with innocence and with piety, need not doubt, but they are, after the example of the good Patriarchs, *walking with God.*

In some occupation or other, then, every member of society ought to be engaged. But it should be observed farther, that, as such occupations are various, and, as among them, some must be more immediately incumbent on particular men than others; so each man's study will always most commendably be exerted in doing that business which is properly his own. What that is, will generally be pointed out by the special talents, opportunities, stations, or callings, of the persons concerned. *There are in the body civil, as the Apostle hath observed concerning the body spiritual, many members* (Rom. xii. 4. 8.); and, since in neither of these bodies can all members have the same office, his following exhortation may, with great propriety, be accommodated to them both. *Having gifts differing according to the grace given unto us; whether prophecy, let us prophecy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.* In short: *Whatsoever our hand findeth to do, whatsoever business our proper station sets before us, we must not be slothful in it, but we must do it with our might.* (Comp. Eccl. ix. 10. with Rom. xii. 11.)

Give me leave to bring home this important point to ourselves: for surely we of this place also have our employments; employments of no small moment, either to ourselves or to the community; of which, however, I as little need to specify the several kinds, as to enumerate the peculiar obligations we lie under to a faith-

ful discharge of them: whilst we daily walk upon the same ground that was once trod; whilst we occupy the places that were formerly filled; whilst we partake of the bounty that was either exerted or enjoyed, by men of distinguished eminence in their generations, and the glory of their times, shall I add, whilst the images of their persons appear full in our view: must *not our hearts burn within us*, fired with a generous ardour after some resemblance, at least, of their excellences, and with a laudable ambition of being, in some degree, beneficial to, in some degree respected by, those that come after us? And need I observe to you, in the mean while, that they never acquired those treasures of learning, by means whereof they have enriched our public repositories, and made our way to science at once shorter and more agreeable, merely by entering into other men's labours through partial extracts from them; much less by spending their time in nothing else, but in perusing some new thing, some hasty production, which, like the Prophet's gourd, cometh up in a night, and perisheth in a night: but, by retired meditation, and laborious researches into those secret truths, which *Wisdom sheweth to them only, who seek her early, and walk with her in solitary paths.* And, if we expect to be blessed with the same success, to discharge the offices to which we may be called, with the same reputation; and, in particular, to adorn our holy profession, and defend its truths, with the same abilities; we also must, after their example, endure hardness, and bear the yoke, in our youth: we must, like them, study to shew ourselves approved unto God and man, if we hope to go forth from hence equally sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and alike prepared unto every good work.

Yet, after all; the work of most indispensable obligation, and in which, whatever our situation or our profession may be, we are most nearly concerned, is that of promoting our Creator's glory, by setting forward the salvation of others, and especially *making our own calling and election sure.* A work, which, though it need not, must not ordinarily, supersede all the others, is yet, in comparison with them, *the one thing needful.* It is indeed that work, for the sake of which, chiefly, we came into the world, and which, if we

leave

leave undone, good had it been for us that we had not been sent into it; and yet a work it is, not to be accomplished by a few slight endeavours, or without *striving, giving diligence, and watching thereunto with all perseverance*. The bare learning of our duty is a work of no small attention! how much more pains, then, must be taken in the due performance of it! To touch upon a single branch of it only, that which more immediately relates to ourselves. Here, the most untainted will find some difficulty in subduing the irregular tendencies of their carnal part; whilst a far greater number, having (from a bad education, or for want of a good one, from the influence of ill example, or the inticements of ill company) made some progress in a wrong course of life, must, besides the arduous work of overcoming corrupt inclinations, engage in the still more painful task of extirpating vicious habits. And all in general will find it matter of constant labour, though, under divine grace, of ever-increasing pleasure, to rectify their tempers and *purify their hearts*; to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; to raise their affections unto a relish for religious exercises and spiritual enjoyments; not only (in the language of St. Paul) to put off the old man, which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts; but to put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness; that holiness, without which, no man shall see the Lord. And yet,

IV. For all our works, this last in particular, we have a day only, or short time, allowed us; after which, *the night cometh, when no man can work*.

This, in the most obvious application, is the day or season of each man's life. And that, in this respect, *the night cometh* upon every one of us, can (I suppose) need no proof. Those portions of duration, with which we are here acquainted, roll on apace: and whether this rotation be near its own conclusion or not, the share that each of us hath in it, as his own time of trial, assuredly is so. In our easiest moments, *there is but a step between us and death*: and the oldest man living may truly say, with the experienced Patriarch, *few and evil have the days of the years of my life been*. Yet, no sooner will this short life be closed, but an end must come of all such working, as will be available to our everlasting salvation:

it being the uniform doctrine of the inspired writings, in some places directly asserted, in all taken for granted, that every man's final allotment will be according to the works done in his body. (2 Cor. v. 10.)

And, as thus much is sufficient for the purpose of the observation now before us; so (by the way) more than this, I presume, cannot be urged upon any clear grounds of holy Scripture. That *there is in the grave, whither we are going, no such work or device, as our hands here find to do, no such wisdom or knowledge* (Eccl. ix. 10.) as our present situation engageth us in pursuit of, we allow and maintain: but it doth not follow, nor would the wise preacher's argument for industry be at all enforced by supposing, that death brings with it, not only a cessation from working, but a privation of thought and perception in every kind. If our expectations in a future state be usually (for it must not be said, always) referred to the day of general retribution, this may well be accounted for, by concluding, not that after death no degree of comfort to the good, or of uneasiness to the bad, shall take place, but (which is readily admitted), that the sentence upon neither shall be publicly pronounced and fully executed, before that Great Day. And as to the suggestion, that the person awaking at the last day from such a total sleep as is contended for, unconscious of any intervening duration, will conceive the moment of his resurrection to be immediately connected with the moment of his decease; neither will this obviate all the Scripture passages usually alleged on the other side. Hear only the memorable declaration of St. Paul: *What I should choose, I wot not: for I am in a strait betwixt two; having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better: nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you*. (Phil. i. 22—25.) The alternative, in the Apostle's view, you will observe, was this: whether he should, by departing, become happy with Christ, or, by abiding in the flesh, continue useful in the church. And to occasion any such difficulty, as is here represented, he must have understood, that his making choice of the latter of these two objects before him, would be no ordinary instance of self-denial in regard to the former. Now, what self-denial could there

there be in foregoing, for the present only, an object at present not attainable nor expected by him? The Apostle might have chosen to continue for many years with his beloved Philippians, for their furtherance and joy of faith, without postponing, for one moment, any such enjoyment of his own as was not to commence before the general judgment. Nor does it appear, how the strait, he here declares himself in, can be accounted for; or how his affection for his converts can be viewed in that amiable light, in which we now see it; without supposing him fully assured, that the longer his life should be continued for their benefit, just so much the longer he must be detained from what he here calls, being with Christ: and that the same hour, that should remove him from them, would put him in actual possession of that far better state.

But, to return and proceed: There is a day of health, often yet shorter than that of animal life, but beyond which there seldom remains much ability for working to any considerable purpose: a reflection this, of great moment; and of which, therefore, we are frequently reminded. In fact, *slottfulness itself casteth into a deep sleep* (Prov. xix. 15.): our faculties, through disuse, become indispensed, and by degrees unqualified, for any laudable exertion; till at last such an affected inactivity terminates in a real incapacity. The like effect may also, in other instances, be owing to the quite contrary cause; for we sometimes observe, with concern, the seemingly firmest constitutions totally enfeebled, or the brightest faculties irrecoverably disordered, by an excessive intenseness of application. And, where neither of these extremes can be directly charged with the melancholy change, the Supreme Disposer of all things, on some occasions, thinks fit (for reasons always wise, though not always discernible by us) to *pour contempt upon the mighty*, by *weakening their bodily strength*; or to *take away the heart of the chief of the earth*, in intellectual endowments, *causing them* (if I may use holy Job's expression) *to wander in a wilderness, where there is no way*. (Job. xii. 21. 24.) But, without pretending to distinguish the several causes of such affecting appearances, their influence, in relation to every material business of life, is well known; and is surely a perpetual call

upon us to *remember our Creator*, and to *finish his works*; while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when we shall say, *we have no pleasure in them*.

Especially since, farther, with regard to our principal work, we have strong intimations, that there is an *accepted time, a day of salvation*; which may be closed before the close of life, or even the loss of natural faculties. Not that sincere repentance and real reformation will ever come too late for acceptance. *When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness, that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right* (Ezek. xviii. 27.), we may pronounce, upon the highest authority, that *he shall save his soul alive*. But we have no authority to pronounce, that *they may*, at pleasure, *do good who have been accustomed to do evil*: or, that such as have long been sinning willfully, shall presently be renewed again unto repentance, upon their vouchsafing to cast a thought that way. Reasoning, by analogy, from similar cases, leads us toward a different conclusion. We see almost daily examples, wherein mere sorrow, and even ardent wishes, nay, real endeavours, are found insufficient to repair a man's fortune, or to restore his health, when once wasted and destroyed by riot and extravagance. And, if such methods are thus unable to set all right in men's temporal concerns, what wise man would reduce himself to a necessity of trying their success in an affair of infinitely greater moment; or of relying on their efficacy, not only for removing all the consequences of a life of sin, but for securing the rewards of a life of holiness? The truth is, repentance itself is no such easy matter as seems to be too commonly supposed. The completion of it, at least, if not the first motion towards it, is certainly *the gift of God*. And how can the habitual sinner presume, that the spirit of God should always strive with him? Why should he not rather apprehend, that the time may soon come, when, though he should become *willing to inherit the blessing* (Comp. Heb. xii. 17. with Gen. xxvii.) he hath profanely despised, his pretensions shall be rejected? not because real repentance would even then be unavailable, supposing him capable of it; but because he shall then find *no place of repentance, though he should cry for it earnestly with tears*.

Upon

Upon the whole: We are sent into life by our great Creator; upon an errand of indispensable necessity: to be accomplished, if at all, within a space of time, short at best, and yet uncertain also; not only in respect of its continuance, but of our ability to make a proper use of it. What remains then, but that, agreeably to our Lord's declaration in my text, and to the last observation above deduced from it,

V. We should, all of us, resolve to prosecute this great business while it is day; lest the night should overtake us, before our work be finished.

Could the night of death justly be considered as the period, not of our working only, but of our very being; the libertine's conclusion, *Let us eat and drink, unmanly as it is, would hardly be more unmanly than his principle, to-morrow we die.* But, in how very different a light must the certainty and nearness of death appear, when an eternity of happiness or misery is understood to depend upon the life preceding it. If we all die only to live again: if the night of death is to be succeeded by a new day, whose sun shall no more go down; if, after our bodies have slept in the dust, we must all awake; some to everlasting life and glory, and some to shame and everlasting contempt: if, once more, we must then be irreversibly sentenced to the one or the other of these most opposite conditions, from the character we shall by an unerring judge be found to have sustained here, either of faithful stewards or of unprofitable servants: who can express the infatuation of consuming those years in vanity, or of drowning in sensuality those faculties by our application of which our situation must be determined, in a life endless and a state unchangeable!

Let us think betimes, how amazing the approach of death must appear—far more amazing than the approach of night to an improvident traveller, who has a great part of his laborious but necessary day's journey still to be performed: should the business of our lives prove then unfinished; but, especially, should it hardly be well begun. In our early years, indeed, while the circulations are free, and the spirits brisk, time may glide along with tolerable smoothness in a course of unthinking gaiety. The young man may rejoice in his youth, and let his heart cheer him: he may, for some time, walk in the ways of his heart, and in the sight of his eyes; indulging himself without

reserve in the gratification of every sense and appetite. But *the voice of the Lord God will be heard in the cool of the day*: and, when the remonstrances of conscience begin to force themselves upon him; what must his searchings of heart be! whether he looks back upon a world, out of which he is just going, without having seriously engaged in any one work for which he was sent into it; or whether he looks forward into another, upon which he is just entering, without having provided any one requisite qualification for it; and in which he must know, that for all these things, all the hours he has trifled away, all the talents he has misemployed, *God will bring him to judgment!*

Or supposing, what is at all times possible, at no time improbable, that the King of terrors, instead of making leisurely advances, and notifying his approach, should unawares seize the strong man and overcome him: should the worthless voluptuary's soul be this night required of him, or he be deprived of that understanding, which he hath so wretchedly misused; under how much greater astonishment must be awake in the world of spirits, an entire stranger as he is to spiritual joys, and utterly incapable of intermeddling with, or bearing any part in them! What heart can conceive the anguish, with which the man of wit and parts, or of wealth and dignity, after a life of indolence and insignificance, especially if also of lewdness and impiety, shall see the industrious peasant whom he hath perhaps oppressed, or the plodding student whom he hath probably held in contempt, *sitting down hereafter in the kingdom of heaven, and himself for ever thrust out!*

Whereas, on the other hand, in the evening of a life spent in *doing his Lord's will*, with what serenity may the faithful servant wait for his coming; in constant readiness to open to him immediately, and in humble confidence that *his reward is with him, and his work before him.* In other instances, it may be some little discouragement to industry, to observe the success of men's labours not always answerable to the constancy of them. Disappointments of this sort must often happen in worldly pursuits; where, of many that may run, but one can ordinarily receive the prize. But, in the great race that is set before us Christians, the case is far otherwise. We may here be competitors without interference; and though

though we all run, we may each of us obtain. We serve a Master, by whom well-meaning merit (and with him sincere endeavours are accepted for merit) shall not always be forgotten; and in whose work if we are but *steadfast and unmoveable* (1 Cor. xv. 58.), and to the best of our abilities always abounding, our labour shall, in no degree of it, finally be in vain. Let us *work our work betimes; and in his time be*, by whom we are employed, *will assuredly give us our full reward.* (Ecclus. li. 30.)

I have only to add, what must not be omitted in treating this subject, that our own strength is small; so small, as to be of itself utterly disproportioned either to the difficulty of the work, or the excellency of the reward proposed to us. In truth, *it is God that worketh in us, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.* (Phil. ii. 12, 13.) But then, since it is always his good pleasure to assist as well as to *reward them that diligently seek him*; so far should the foregoing reflection be from damping our resolution, or excusing our inactivity, that it is at once a most awful and most animating incitement to work

out our own salvation with fear and trembling.

If any of you, then, lack wisdom, let him ask of God: to him let us all apply ourselves for guidance and support through this arduous undertaking; humbly beseeching him, that he would turn away our eyes, lest with appetite or eagerness they behold vanity, and quicken us in his way; that he would strengthen our hands, and prosper the work of them; that, in this place more especially, he would sanctify all our studies, to the attainment of that knowledge, not which puffeth up one against another, but which maketh charitable to the edifying of our brethren, and wise unto our own salvation; that all our works may be begun, continued and ended in him; and that at length, when the time of our departure is at hand, we may, by his mercy overlooking whatever hath been amiss in us, and through the merits of our Redeemer supplying what is wanting on our parts, each of us be able to address him, in the words of the same his well-beloved Son: *I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work, which thou gavest me to do!*

S E C T I O N VIII.

FROM THE

SERMONS of JOHN TOTTIE, D. D.
CANON of CHRIST CHURCH, and ARCHDEACON of WORCESTER.

S E R M O N I.

Ridicule, so far as it affects Religion,
considered and censured.

2 PETER, iii. 3.

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the
last days scoffers.

IT would be a great point gained in the cause of truth, if we could once persuade men to reason calmly and dispassionately about it; if they could be brought to debate on things serious in a serious manner, and to govern all their inquiries in matters of an allowed importance, by the rules of decency and sobriety. No man that is a real friend to religion, can be willing to oppose a rational examination into the truth of any opinions or doctrines, that come recommended to us by the authority of so venerable a name; not only because this would be an impregnable security to error, where it had ever taken possession, but because the interest of truth itself must be injured by it; which may give room for suspicion, when it declines a scrutiny, but will, like gold in the furnace, retain all its weight and purity in the trial, and shine even with a greater lustre for the severity of it. But then likewise every man who professes himself to be a free inquirer into religious concerns, should bring with him a mind duly disciplined to render his inquiries successful. Having laid in a proper store of previous knowledge to inform his understanding, he must be satisfied of the vast importance of the matters he is about to take into consideration; he must approach them with modesty and reverence, examine them with meekness and sincerity, and judge of them with impar-

tiality. Those who are already settled in true religious principles would not long be at variance with such a disposition as this. But it is one thing, to convince men who delight in instruction, and another, to prepare men to be capable of conviction. This is a task of difficulty and labour indeed. For whilst a levity of mind, an affectation of novelty, an undistinguishing aversion to superstition, the self-sufficiency of ignorance or superficial inquiry, the prevalence of fashion, or contagion of evil acquaintance, and, above all, strong prejudice in favour of vicious habits, determine men severally against the doctrines and duties of our holy religion, how shall we go about to explain or enforce either the one or the other? In vain to such unbelievers do we oppose the strength of reason and argument, when they lose all their force merely because they are advocates for religion; whilst for the same reason, every little plausible plea that can be urged in favour of infidelity is caressed as a demonstration. And, to aggravate the misfortune, these are a generation so wise in their own eyes, that as they will not give ear to admonition, so neither will they be prevailed upon to be silent; obstinate in error, they labour for proselytes to it; like the deaf adder, they will not hear the voice of the charmer, and the poison of it is under their lips. It is notwithstanding our duty, with whatever success it may be attended, to persevere in recommending the interests of Christ and his religion, by the force of our doctrine, and by the example of our lives; and especially it behoves us, since we place the success of our cause upon the truth of it, that we neither defend it ourselves in such a manner as to weaken it, nor suffer our adversaries to overthrow it by subtlety and

and stratagem; and that, as we may be sure, they can be furnished with no arguments against us from right reason, so we suffer them not, without detection, to substitute fallacies in their room.

It falls not within my present design, to enumerate or distinguish by their several kinds all the arts of false reasoning by which they pervert the judgment of mankind, seduce the illiterate and unwary, and even sometimes perplex the diligent and more learned inquirer. As sophistry is their science, it must be owned that some of them are great proficients in it, and can furnish out examples to every rule. But my text confines me to the consideration of a particular artifice, which, though it has little to do with reason, and rarely with the appearance of it, has perhaps done more mischief in general to true religion, than every other craft beside; I mean that of mockery and ridicule. And I am supported in this assertion by an author of great name, who, though he has loudly declared himself an advocate for the free use of them upon all subjects, yet seems to think, that if they had but been seasonably applied, they might have crushed Christianity in its infancy. "He never heard that the ancient Heathens (though the irreligious part of them had long before tried the same method, unsuccessfully it seems, against some of their own philosophers) were so well advised in their ill purpose of suppressing the Christian religion in its first rise, as to make use at any time of what he calls a Bartlemew-fair method; but this he is persuaded of, that had the truth of the gospel been any way surmountable, they would have bid much fairer for the silencing it, if they had chose to bring our primitive founders upon the stage in a pleasanter way than that of bear-skins and pitch-barrels; and he is apt to think, that if the Jews had tried their wit and malice this way against our Saviour and his Apostles, they might possibly have done our religion more harm than by all their other ways of severity." Now though we know that Christianity is built upon a sure foundation which can never be removed, and accordingly has from the beginning surmounted the united efforts of mockery and persecution (as Christ himself was clothed with a robe of pur-

ple, and hailed as a mock-king, before he was led to his crucifixion; and as the Apostles of Christ were exposed to the derision as well as to the cruelty of their enemies), yet so far we must agree, that nothing has done or can do our religion greater harm than ridicule, in totally subverting the faith of many, and weakening that of more. A persuasion of the truth of this remark will be apt to make us startle a little at another of the same author's, which is not easily to be reconciled with this, and may deserve to be taken into consideration. For in another place he would have "ridicule to be the proper test of what is serious, as gravity is of ridicule; because a subject that will not bear raillery is suspicious, just as a jest that will not bear a serious examination is false wit." The reason of this he had given us before. "For that, says he, which can be shewn only in a certain light is questionable. Truth, it is supposed, may bear all lights; and one of those principal lights or natural mediums by which things are to be viewed in order to a through recognition is ridicule itself, which he calls that manner of proof, by which we discern whatever is liable to just raillery in any subject." The insinuation designed is obvious, that true religion can never suffer by this method, though imposture may. Now, forasmuch as ridicule is here represented in such a light as to render it upon all occasions not only innocent but laudable, as being a sure guide to lead us to the knowledge of the truth, and a never-failing test to try the worth of every principle and opinion; and because an acquiescence in this notion may be attended with very fatal consequences (even where the ridicule is as genteel as this author pleases; a quality that may in some cases render it even more dangerous, as it engages the favour of mankind to whatever it accompanies), I shall endeavour in the remaining part of my discourse to shew,

I. That an inclination to ridicule is apt to lead men off from any serious inquiries at all: that it cannot in itself avail to the discovery or the trial of religious truths; and that the practice of it is neither a proper nor effectual method to promote the interest of them.

II. I shall observe how those who pretend most to this talent of ridicule do in reality employ it; and shall expostu-

with them a little upon their conduct.

III. In order to render this discourse more useful, I shall briefly recommend some means of securing our religion and ourselves against any attacks that may come from this quarter.

I. If, as I have laid down in my first observation, a fondness for ridicule is apt to lead men off from any serious inquiries at all, it will follow, that we ought to be cautious how we indulge ourselves in a propensity or inclination to it; because, allowing that it might be of service if properly applied, yet in all likelihood we never shall make that right application. And that the foregoing observation is just, experience will teach us, and reason may account for what experience teaches us to be true.

For whatever qualities may be necessary to furnish men with a talent for ridicule, yet we shall almost universally find a levity of mind to be the main spring that sets it in action, as it disposes them to derision and to treat every thing ludicrously that falls in their way. And accordingly we may observe, that what those, who are eminent in this character, seek after and labour for, is only something to be witty upon; and so fond are they of shewing their abilities at a jest, that whenever it occurs, they throw it out, in season, or out of season; at friends, at religion, and on the most solemn occasions. Nor indeed is it to be presumed, that men bigotted to this kind of wit will ever lose an opportunity of exerting it; or that they will be restrained in what they say to propriety and decency, when sprightliness and humour is all that they aim at. It is evident that men of this turn must be impatient, if not incapable, of cool and sedate reflection, and must have a frame of spirit opposite to every thing that is grave and manly. They can be no more inclined to, than they are qualified for, sober inquiries. For how should they, think ye, perplex themselves with abstracted reasonings, with examination of first principles, and pursue a tedious deduction of consequences from them, in order to settle what they are in no care to have at all (let us call it) their thoughts? Is it likely that these should give themselves the pain of long and laborious searches, which the perverse disputings of men have in many places made necessary for the disentangling

of truth, whose profession is only to make themselves sport? Or is it probable, that they should concern themselves to any useful purpose with the more obvious duties of religion, which carries too grave an aspect to recommend itself to such an acquaintance, which condemns all foolish jesting, and is itself the most serious thing in the world?

Indeed, that men of this turn should have made some superficial inquiries into religious matters, and that by a slender application they should have furnished themselves with a kind of skill therein, which is worse than ignorance, namely, that of raising doubts and difficulties without knowing, or caring for, a solution, is as readily to be accounted for as admitted: because hence is raised their lasting fund for ridicule, without which they would have but few opportunities of displaying their talent. For as true ridicule should be levelled at things really and nothing more than absurd, such as are fit to excite no other passion than the bare derision of mankind, so we shall find it to be a work of too delicate and subtle a spirit, to be performed by every pretender to it: whereas there is a kind of it that is open to the most bungling capacity, which consists entirely in misrepresenting, by a ludicrous manner, things truly serious and solemn. And the more they are so, the more is the ridicule heightened by it; as persons are the more exposed by an antic representation in proportion to the gravity of their characters. Thus will a fondness for ridicule in all probability prevent men from entering at all into any inquiries relating to religious matters, any further than as they will furnish materials to them for the exercise of their wit.

But supposing that it was possible for men of this trivial and fantastical frame of mind to busy themselves in earnest in an inquiry into religious opinions and doctrines, in order to think aright, and to act agreeably to a deliberate judgment; yet I must further observe, that their talent of ridicule would not in the least avail them in this case, either as an assistant in the pursuit, or as a criterion for the trial, of the truth. This will effectually appear from the nature of truth itself, and the means which that will necessarily point out for the attainment of it. Now truth, as far as human understanding is the sub-

ject of it, "consists in the perception of the visible or probable agreement or disagreement of ideas, as they are affirmed or denied one of another." It is evident, that in order to this perception, judgment is the most useful faculty of the mind, which is that of discerning and distinguishing between the several ideas it has. Without this, all our thinking would be nothing but confusion, and upon it depends the evidence and certainty of every truth which the mind of man can, by the assistance of its own powers, attain to. And the nicety and exactness of judgment consists in accurately separating, one from another, ideas wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by similitude, and by affinity, to take one thing for another. Whatever therefore tends to disturb, to pervert, or to embarrass, this faculty, must in proportion render us less capable of attaining to, or discerning the truth. That ridicule has such a tendency, the very nature of it will inform us. For as it is properly that species of wit, which aims to expose things to laughter by a fantastical and ludicrous representation of them, it will so far appear to partake of the nature of wit in general, as to lie rather in putting together, in order to please and to surprise, ideas wherein can be found any distant resemblance or congruity, than in a careful observation wherein they differ; and whilst the great aim of it is to form burlesque pictures rather than true images in the mind, and it must of consequence be more solicitous to divert the imagination than to instruct the understanding, we shall find, that for once that it will lead us to the knowledge of truth, it will a thousand times misguide us. Nay, in some particular instances, ridicule may not only probably, but must necessarily, lead us from a right notion of things, namely whenever it intermeddles with any doctrines of religion, that should happen to be agreeable to truth; although it is pretended, that these can possibly receive no prejudice from it. For as it is the end of ridicule to expose things to laughter and derision, and as truly religious matters have not any thing in them that is liable to this sort of treatment, so they must necessarily be disguised and misrepresented by false colours, before they can in any degree be

capable of it. Where then will be the possibility of knowing and distinguishing the truth, when it shall so resemble error, that we shall be no longer able to delineate the genuine features of it? or how can that be an assistant towards the discovery of it, which is the very thing that puts on it the mask?

But, further: Neither is ridicule at all a better criterion for the trial of truth, than it is an assistant to us in the pursuit of it. It is by no means proving it to be so, by asserting that truth is to be tried by ridicule, because it never can prevail against the truth; that if it be wrong placed, it will recoil upon itself, and be its own corrector in the end; and that mocking at things truly serious and venerable, fixes a reproach upon the understanding of him only that attempts it. For though we know that truth will so far prevail, as to be incapable of being made false by any artifices whatsoever, yet may it not by being ridiculed appear to be so, and lose much of that good effect which it might otherwise have produced? and may not a hasty determination be made to the prejudice of it, before the ridicule is discerned to be false? Nay, may not persecution, or any other the most injurious treatment of religion, be as well recommended upon this principle for the trial of truth, because in the end it will be superior to them all? And though we allow that a man may by a misapplication of his wit, make himself truly ridiculous to those who have just notions of things; yet we must be sensible that the generality of men are not competent judges, whether it be exercised unseasonably or duly; nor are they able truly to distinguish between what falls under ridicule, and what really deserves to do so. And I would ask even those, who are capable of weighing things in an equal balance, and of making just and equitable determinations, how it is that they themselves can tell, whether ridicule is pointed at its proper object, or not? Can it be known any otherwise than by the cool deliberation of the understanding, which must take things as they are in themselves under examination, and conclude from a judicious inquiry into the true nature of them, whether they deserve to be treated ludicrously or not? Or can they justify even to themselves their raillery of any thing,

thing, till they have by reason and reflection first satisfied themselves that it is irrational and absurd? Now what kind of a test that is, which must itself be tried by another criterion, namely that of strict reason, before it can be admitted as such, when this latter is capable of answering every purpose much better without it; and how useless such a rule must be to measure religious truth by; I shall leave to the determination of every serious and unprejudiced mind.

But the most specious plea of all in behalf of this practice is yet behind, and which carries the greater weight with it because it has sometimes been espoused by those who have been indisputably friends to the cause of virtue and religion. It has been urged, that though ridicule is in no wise to be proposed as a guide to conduct us to the knowledge of religious truths, or as a standard to prove them by, yet when they are once established upon their proper foundation, and have approved themselves to our calm and deliberate judgment, that then it may be of considerable service, both in the defence and recommendation of them: that it may be prevalent to silence unreasonable opposition; to keep true piety in countenance, and to make irreligion ashamed. That that weapon may be successfully employed on the righteous side, which has so often fought the battles of profaneness and infidelity; or to make use of an ingenious allusion, that is truly useful and good so long as it retains "the nature of that salt to which it is usually compared, which preserves and keeps sweet the good and the sound parts of all bodies, and only frets, dries up, and destroys, those humours which putrify and corrupt."

It is not because I would deprive religion of any aid whatsoever that can contribute to the security of it, but because I would have no auxiliaries called in to its assistance, whose fidelity and services are questionable, that I proceed notwithstanding to observe, that ridicule is neither a proper nor effectual method to promote the real interest of religion.

As for the gainfayers, it is in vain to think of silencing them by retaliation of raillery; who then only are enabled to oppose the truth with success, when the trial of it is put upon a wrong issue: it never can be effectually done but by se-

rious argumentation proposed in the spirit of meekness and charity. The former alone will secure our cause, and the latter will contribute much to win over our adversaries. Whilst we rely upon strict reasoning only, we secure to ourselves a sure foundation; and a soft answer is a recommendation to others of the reasonings it contains. Whereas there is an acrimony in ridicule, which will exasperate rather than reclaim men, and make them incapable of receiving the truth by prejudicing them against it; and ourselves it will be apt to delude by setting up false lights, and may give our adversaries an advantage over us by leading us out of the way.

Much less should ridicule intrude itself into matters of controversy betwixt Christians themselves; as it seems to carry in it a spirit directly contrary to that of the religion they profess; as it lays both parties open to the scoffs of their common enemies; and as it can only shew at last, not which has the most righteous cause, but which has the keenest pen. Experience may teach us some of the mischiefs of this practice: for instances may be given wherein men have set out in a serious dispute on matters of importance, and have seemed to promise much success therein from their debates, while they were confined to argument and directed by moderation; till, raillery and ridicule having supplanted reasoning, the point in question was no longer in view; what was before a friendly contest for the truth, became a spiteful trial of wit, and from a difference of opinion grew an irreconcilable hatred in the heart. So much more likely is ridicule to perpetuate quarrels, than to decide a dispute.

If upon any religious occasions, ridicule seems to be allowable, it must be with regard to such opinions, as are evidently erroneous; such especially as are so big with absurdities, and so contradictory to common sense, that it seems below the dignity of reason to undertake the refutation of them. And yet of what service can it be even in this case? Whatever gave birth to such monsters, it is plain that strong prejudice alone keeps them alive; which even impresses on them a sacred character. To endeavour to laugh men out of such prejudices, is to confirm them the more in them; as their conversion is never likely to be brought

about by such means as must inspire them with horror. Rather let kindness and persuasion remove the prejudice, and then the error will be dispelled of course.

Neither is ridicule at all fit to be trusted as proper to promote the practice of religion and virtue, by endeavouring to put vice and immorality out of countenance. These, I fear, are not of so modest a nature as to be capable of blushing: and if arguments of a more sublime kind, and such as are drawn from nobler motives, will not prevail against them, they are not to be vanquished by being laughed at. The obligation we are under to conform to the will of God, which is the foundation of duty; the essential and eternal differences of things, which constitute virtue and vice; the conformity of the one, and the disagreement of the other, to our nature; and the improvement or debasement of it consequent upon our different choice of acting; are the true motives to influence and determine a rational creature. The love of God to mankind, and his abhorrence of wickedness, exhibited in the mystery of our redemption; the precepts, the example, and the sufferings of our blessed Lord and Master; the life and immortality which he has revealed; the gracious promises of the gospel to allure men to goodness; and the dreadful judgments denounced against the obstinately profane; are still more forcible motives to persuade and to animate a Christian. If men's minds are steeled against receiving any impression from such topics as these, it is even a kind of presumption to expect it from ridicule; which besides we are not authorized to make use of, either by revelation or by reason. It was not the practice of Christ and his Apostles to make a jest of men's vices; but they discountenanced all such behaviour, as much as might be, both by their doctrine and by their examples. Even Solomon himself, who insists so much upon the folly of wickedness, does not treat it ludicrously as for his diversion, but speaks of it as a folly more apt to move melancholy than mirth, even as the folly of foolishness and madness. And reason itself may likewise inform us, that nothing is so likely to lessen the natural veneration and awe in men, with which the consideration of religious matters is attended,

and upon which in a great measure depends the good effect they are likely to produce in the mind, as a light and ludicrous treatment of them. Men will be apt to think that things cannot be of any mighty consequence, which even those who recommend them make so free withal themselves; and that neither danger nor death is at hand, where those that denounce them are themselves in sport.

Is ridicule then of no real use at all? and is it absolutely to be banished out of the world? To assert this would seem too severe perhaps to those, who think they have a talent for it. But so long as it is left in full possession of every folly, of every absurdity and extravagance in life; in short, of all things that are blemishes in human conduct, rather than vices, the advocates for it will have no reason to complain that it will ever want employment. And though I have been labouring to exclude it from all concerns in religion, even where it offers its assistance and friendship, yet I have not done it by representing it in this last case as a thing criminal so much as imprudent to admit of it: neither do I accuse those who are for enlisting it in the service of religion of any treacherous designs, but have only offered my reasons why I disapprove of their judgment.

And if from the foregoing considerations it shall appear, that ridicule is not even fit to be allowed of in the support of religion, how strong must be the conclusion, that it never should be employed to the destruction of it? If it stands in need of excuse even in a good man and in a good cause; how utterly unpardonable must it be, when used by bad men to bad purposes? For it is not to be expected that the pleasantry of wickedness should take away the malignity of it, or that wit should atone for sin. And yet that there is a daring tribe of men, that declare open war with it against every thing that is sacred, it is now time to shew under my second general head, where I am,

II. To observe, how those who pretend most to this talent of ridicule do in reality employ it, and to expostulate with them a little upon their conduct.

The first sort of men that fall under our notice, are those who shoot out their arrows against all religion in general; who

who have no just notions of God and his attributes; deny or disregard his providence; confound all distinctions of moral good and evil; and have no sense at all of the dignity of human nature. These having, as they call it, enlarged their thoughts, and being under no manner of restraint from principles, look down with pity and contempt upon those who are still shackled with them, and have not thrown off all regard to reason and conscience. How do these men of unlimited freedom make diversion with slaves who own themselves to be under inspection, and accountable for their actions! It is matter to them of endless derision, that we, who are but a better kind of brutes, should pay such homage to virtue, as to renounce the pleasures of the world, and often subject ourselves to present cares and inconveniences, for the sake of it, when all that we can propose to ourselves is a precarious expectancy in reversion; much more, when this idol Virtue that we fall down before, is nothing but a phantom, the creature of our own foolish imaginations; or at best depends only upon custom, and the arbitrary constitution of human laws. And, accordingly, there is not a single moral virtue, which they would not banter out of the world, by miscalling it by some reproachful name. If we shew zeal for the honour of God, they will mock at our enthusiasm; if we worship and fear him, at our superstition. Whatever generous things have been done for the welfare of mankind, will meet with no better a name, than that of folly, or vanity, or design; and all private goodness will be exposed by them as grimace, hypocrisy, and preciseness. In a word, *Whatever things are true, and honest, and just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise;* these things they make the constant subject of their mockery and abuse, ridicule and railery. On the contrary, whatever things are profane, and impure, and vile, and dishonourable, these things they are industrious to represent as harmless and indifferent, and to laugh men out of their natural shame and abhorrence of them; nay, even to recommend them with their utmost wit.

If these men could be supposed capable of sober reflection, I would expostulate with them in the following manner:

What (in the name of all that's sacred!) is there ridiculous in the belief of a supreme, infinite, intelligent Mind, the Creator and Governor of the universe? Is it not most absurd and foolish to suppose the contrary, if we will but reflect upon the vastness and regularity and exactness of this beautiful system? And may not the surprising harmony continually preserved in all the parts of it, very reasonably persuade us, that the great author of it still holds it together by his providence, keeping it uniformly in subjection to the laws he at first prescribed? What is there ludicrous in supposing also this being to be just and holy and good, and therefore the same God of order in the moral world as he is in the natural? That for that reason, he created man with an excellent understanding to discern good from evil; and with freedom of will, to make him capable, according to his behaviour, of reward or punishment? Can it excite any but the laughter of fools, when we place the excellency of man's nature in his rational faculties, and the justness of his conduct in the regulation of it by reason? What folly is there in submitting ourselves to that which was given us for our guide and instructor? Or how can we find any thing ridiculous in those actions, which our governing principle not only approves of but commands? Is there any thing weak or extravagant in the reverence and love of God, in submission to his government, in celebrating his perfections, and acknowledging our constant dependence upon his providence? Justice and probity and integrity and benevolence towards men, have likewise nothing in them that deserves to be laughed at; but, on the contrary, both from the reasonableness and the usefulness of them are truly valuable. Temperance, sobriety, and chastity, though they are common subjects of derision, are upon every account to be embraced, and have at all times been held in esteem by men of sense and worth. In short, there is not in any principle of natural religion, nor in any duty it recommends, any thing wild or absurd, or fantastical or trifling; nothing, on the contrary, but what is highly rational, important, sacred. How great then is the folly and madness and impiety of those, who thus wantonly shoot arrows against Heaven, that must return upon their

their own heads; and who scatter fire-brands and death among men, and say are we not in sport? Too much, it is to be feared, does the world abound even with this sort of men: but the other class that falls under our censure is perhaps yet more numerous; which consists of those

Who would be thought to be convinced of the obligation, and to allow of the duties of natural religion, but are declared enemies to all revealed, and ridicule the belief of it upon every occasion with all the malice of wit. Now considering the great antiquity that revelation lays claim to, which in some instances, to give a probable account of things, must have been coeval with mankind itself; together with the general belief of it, which, however impaired, has prevailed more or less in almost all places and ages; even this alone should screen it from any insolent abuse of those who disbelieve it themselves: and considering that Christianity itself pleads a prescription of seventeen hundred years, and is at this time the established religion of our own country, it ought at least by those who suspect the grounds of it, to be examined with candor, and to be proceeded against with discretion and gentleness. For there is a decent regard due to the religion of a country, even though it should prove an erroneous one. To laugh at the public upon any account, is to be wanting in that respect which is due to common society; much greater is the insolence when private men venture to deride those things which are the object of public veneration. Whoever therefore, instead of refuting errors by reason and temper, will treat in a contemptuous manner what carries with it to others a sacred character, can only give scandal where he should endeavour at a reformation, and must shew himself to be equally a stranger to good sense and to good manners. And yet this is the favourite method of infidelity. Ridicule is the vein that runs through the writings, and what seasons the conversation, of the unbelievers of the age. And then as much triumph arises from having flung a bold jest at Christianity, as if they had actually overthrown it by mere dint of reasoning. The ancient enemies of it, were no strangers to this practice; and the arts of those have been revived and

improved too in these latter days. The grossest misrepresentations have received an edge from ridicule, in order to make our religion despised, that it might finally be rejected of men. In order to this, has not the necessity, nay expediency, of Christianity been scoffed at as a jest? Have not the strong evidence and testimonies by which it is supported, all in their turns, been the subject of much drollery and licentious mirth? Has not almost every particular doctrine of it been attacked in the most scurrilous manner; and the sacred pages, which contain those doctrines, been derided, vilified, exploded; and perverted by ludicrous quotations to every profane and impious purpose? And the better to complete their design, have not those who, by Christ's own institution, are more particularly appointed to teach and to defend his religion, been the standing mark at which they incessantly shoot their sharpest arrows, even bitter words? And has not their satire against them been generally of that kind, which is of all others the most scurrilous and illiberal?

I must here again beg leave to renew my expostulation, and to inquire a little into the justifiableness of such proceedings.

With regard to the foundation of Christianity, I would ask of them, whether there is any thing ridiculous in supposing (what cannot well be denied) that all mankind had transgressed the original law of God, whether it was natural only, or also revealed; and that they had consequently involved themselves in the guilt of sin: that God is a being infinite in justice as well as mercy; and that, according to our conceptions, it is as much the property of the one, before a reconciliation with offenders, to insist upon some atonement, as it is a token of the other, graciously to accept it: that his purity would likewise incline him to stigmatize wickedness with the most flagrant marks of his displeasure, that righteousness might be the more effectually established: that accordingly he sent his only begotten son into the world, to take human nature upon him; and in that to be a sacrifice and propitiation for the sins of the whole world: that by an extraordinary revelation, (communicated at a time when ignorance and vice had almost universally overspread the face of

the earth, and when the footsteps of religion could only be traced in the ruins that superstition had wrought) he taught mankind their duty in a more perfect and explicit manner, than it had ever been known before; that he fenced in his laws with the most proper sanctions; and promised us such assistance for the fulfilling of them, concurrent with our own endeavours, as the mere natural man must want, both as an encouragement and as a support. This is but an imperfect sketch of the Christian scheme; but enough to discover that there is much in it, to excite our adoration of the divine goodness, but nothing to create our mirth.

With regard to the external evidence of this religion, I would ask, whether (beside the concurrence of other testimony) the completion of many prophecies that went before concerning Christ, and the miracles which he himself wrought, are not a sufficient attestation of the truth of it? As this is too clear a point to be denied, allowing their authority; I would ask concerning the prophecies, whether in answer to all the cavils brought against this kind of proof, it has not been undeniably shewn by the labours of the learned, that they are truly of the date they pretend to; that the interpretations of them are consistent and warrantable; and that the Jews, to whom they were more immediately directed, did all along apply them to the Messiah, although they must know that some of them had likewise a view to other events: and whether they were not all in general fulfilled by Jesus Christ so minutely, as they never were nor could be by any body else? And in relation to the miracles of our Saviour, which have been bantered as illusion, or what is even less than that, as mere allegories; it may likewise be demanded, whether they have not in general been proved to carry in them all the genuine marks that it is possible for any true miracle to have, and whether every one in particular has not been clearly vindicated from the imputation of some imaginary incongruities with which they have been unreasonably charged? If the opposers of Christianity, upon account of its evidence, have not seriously taken into consideration the arguments that have been brought in support of it, it would

be decent in them to suspend their wit till they have better informed their judgment; and if they have, they should confute before they ridicule.

If we proceed to examine into the intrinsic value of our religion, are the doctrines of it a proper subject of derision, which are beyond dispute a better system of morality, than is to be collected from the wisdom of philosophy scattered through all the writings of the world beside? And if there are some few more speculative ones (which may have their moral uses too) relating to the divine essence, and to the work of man's redemption, which may be attended with some difficulties inexplicable by human understanding, are they therefore to be rejected with mockery; because the whole mystery of God's wonderful dispensations is not laid open to our view; or because we cannot comprehend the manner of an infinite existence, though we are absolute strangers to that of our own? Or is it fit that the sacred books themselves, the repository of these doctrines, which are the refuge, the consolation, and the delight, of every good man, should be trodden under foot and vilified, and become a bye-word to the profane and the scoffer? Or is it a sufficient justification of such usage, because men will venture rashly to pronounce upon them, without any one requisite qualification; or because some particular expressions and passages in them, occasioned by the peculiarities of the language, or of the manners and customs of a remote age, give offence to those, whose extent of knowledge reaches only to modern notions and practices? Or, lastly, is it at all becoming, that those who by the appointment of Christ himself are the guardians and teachers of his doctrines, should upon that very account alone, be exposed to ridicule and mockery, to scurrility and abuse? But if that which ought to raise their character tends only to depreciate it, and if the scoffers are resolved to despise all men in their hearts, that have any peculiar relation to the religion of Christ; yet other considerations should induce them to be more decent in their behaviour, and to put some restraint upon their tongues. Some motive to this it should be to reflect, that the clergy are under the common protection of the same civil government

with themselves, and have therefore a title to common civility, even by virtue of the laws of their country: that they are men of a liberal education, that they may be duly qualified for, and are sequestered from every inconsistent employment, that they may without interruption attend upon, the services of religion: that it is by no means matter of just offence, that some also amongst them, should by their station and authority have a proper influence to guard the interests of it: that they do in general discharge their duty conscientiously and well; teaching the religion of Christ in its primitive purity; defending it by their learning, of which perhaps no body of men in the world has a larger share, and adorning it by the integrity of their lives: that where some are ignorant or vicious, the reproach should fall upon the persons culpable, and not upon the order; but that they rather should be counted worthy of double honour, who have maintained the dignity of their character, and preserved it without spot or blemish. But this practice, however reasonable in itself, is not to be expected from the scoffers: for as decency is nearly allied to virtue, we shall find the enemies of the one to be generally as much strangers to the other. Leaving them therefore to their own conduct,

III. It remains only, in the last place, to recommend briefly some means of best securing our religion and ourselves against the attacks that may come from this quarter.

1. The first thing necessary for this purpose, is a thorough knowledge of the grounds and principles of our religion. When we know the reason of the hope that is in us, it then becomes an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast; which will hinder us from fluctuating amidst a diversity of unsettled opinions, and will keep us firm and immovable against all the overflowings of infidelity: conviction arising from an insight into truth, will inspire us in every conflict; and will be a defence to us against the craft of sophistry and the sting of ridicule. Secure in the strength of a rational belief, the enemy can have no advantage over us, nor the wicked approach to hurt us. But if we profess to teach a religion that we have only taken upon trust, as our notions concerning it will be erroneous,

so our instructions will misrepresent it, and our defences betray it. An injurious exposition, or an injudicious vindication, will ruin the best of causes, and lay the author of them open to certain mockery and contempt. How careful therefore should we be, to furnish ourselves by proper application with all necessary and useful knowledge for the service of religion, lest peradventure we be found to fight against God, even out of a zeal for his honour!

2. The second thing requisite for our security in the case before mentioned, is courage and constancy in our persuasion; or, in the Apostle's phrase, boldness in the faith. Our first business should be to be well acquainted with the truth, the next to hold it fast. If we cannot withstand a little banter and ridicule when we have Christ himself on our side, how scandalous must be our retreat, and how vigorously must we expect the advantage to be pursued! We give a satirical enemy great opportunities of triumph, when we give ground ever so little through fear, irresolution, or shame. And well may the great Captain of our Salvation disown such service as withdraws itself upon being laughed at only, when he insists upon the fidelity of it, even in the fiery trial of persecution. Hear, and tremble at the consequence of such a base desertion: *Whoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.* (Mark, viii. 38.) But if we have boldness in him, we shall find it to be our security here, as well as our confidence (when we most shall want it) in the day of judgment.

3. A third thing which may be a defence to us against the scoffers, is that truly christian temper, a spirit of meekness. For a resolution to defend our religion, and an inoffensive manner of doing it, are by no means inconsistent. This behaviour is not only in itself becoming, but it is enjoined us. It is our Saviour's own express command, *learn of me for I am meek and lowly in heart* (Mat. xi. 29.): and it is part of his character, that when he was reviled he reviled not again. The religion of Christ will allow of no arts in its defence or recommendation, that are not perfectly conformable to its rules.

rules. And this conduct may be particularly useful in blunting those arrows that are directed against ourselves; as skilful contenders will oft-times best elude the force of a blow, by not bearing up too rashly against it, and yet at the same time can resolutely maintain their ground. This, likewise, is the most probable method of disarming our adversaries themselves; who must, by this means, if by any, be won over to a decent behaviour, when they see that all their calumny and spite and abuse cannot provoke us to a return of ill usage; but that our only aim is, by all gentle arguments of persuasion, to reduce them from error to the acknowledgment of the truth. It is, in short, the duty of a Christian, not to be overcome of evil: and it is no less his duty, to overcome evil with good.

4. The last thing I shall mention, necessary for the security of our religion, and of ourselves, against the scoffers, is holiness of life. As unreasonable a thing as it is, to make Christianity accountable for that wickedness which it utterly condemns, yet we may observe, that the deepest and most incurable wounds are given it through those, who dishonour it more by professing, than they could injure by denying it. Truth, however bright in itself, may yet be obscured, and lose much of its native splendor in the eyes of men, by the foulness of the medium through which it is viewed. Such will be the influence of the life of a wicked Christian; who is both a scandal to himself, and a reproach to his profession. But a virtuous and holy conversation is the ornament and defence of both. It renders religion graceful and amiable to mankind; and esteem and affection arising from thence, will best guard it from every abuse. But, if it should at any time fall under contempt and ridicule, yet an exemplary Christian will be able to reply with a good grace to the scorner, when his own life is a vindication of his cause, not his cause, as it too often happens, a condemnation of himself. And what better support against particular abuse can a good man wish for, than a consciousness of sharing the same fate with religion itself? or can he be dismayed in suffering for the sake of it, when that also bears a part with him in the unjust reproach that he sustains? A religious man must be ill-treated by an irreligious world: but let

this be his confidence, that the scene will soon be changed. Honour, and glory, and immortality, will be his portion, while insupportable shame and confusion shall overwhelm the scoffers. For *then shall the righteous man stand in great boldness before the face of such as have afflicted him, and made no account of his labours. When they see it, they shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the strangeness of his salvation, so far beyond all that they looked for. And they repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit, shall say within themselves, this was he, whom we had sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproach. We fools counted his life madness, and his end to be without honour: how is he numbered with the children of God, and his lot is among the saints!* (Wisd. 5.1-5.)

SERMON II.

The pernicious Effects of an intemperate Indulgence in sensual Pleasures.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, at St. Mary's, March 13th, 1747-8.]

2 TIM. iii. 4.

Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

THE lovers of pleasures here mentioned by the Apostle are, as the original word properly imports, the lovers of sensual pleasures: and they are described as inordinate lovers of them; as men addicted to voluptuousness beyond a sense of duty, or the restraint of reason and religion. And, doubtless, this is designed to be represented to us as a denomination of great malignity, because it is ranked with a long train of the most enormous and profligate sinners; such as, we are told at the first verse of this chapter, were to be the characteristic and disgrace of the last days, when perilous times should come. Without inquiring how far these dangerous days began to discover themselves even in the Apostolic age, let it suffice, that we ourselves are certainly within the period of time here described: and whatever may be our proportion of other guilt, so far as an avowed attachment to pleasures is destructive of the principles, and inconsistent with the regular duties, of religion, and is an inlet to vice and disorder, so far perilous times are come.

For,

For, to be lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God and our duty, is one of the apparent distinctions of this age; a character so familiar to us, that it seems to have lost its natural deformity, and is rather looked upon with complacency than abhorrence. But opinion does not alter the reality of things: a life of dissoluteness cannot be innocent; and it will ever remain a most certain truth, that an irregular indulgence in sensual pleasures is that, which, above all things, debases human nature, and ever has been, and must be, the bane of human happiness.

Can we therefore employ our time more usefully, than in endeavouring to rescue ourselves from the enchantment of such delusive, but unmanly and pernicious pleasures? Can I apply to you for this purpose in a more interesting manner, than by laying before you the fatal mischiefs of sensuality, by considering particularly, what devastation it makes in every constitution that is under the dominion of it, from the lowest stage of the animal life, to the highest powers and graces of the intellectual and the spiritual one? And although some of the following remarks may seem rather to belong to an abandoned prostitution, than to the lesser proficiencies in voluptuousness, yet they will be often found to be proportionably just in respect of the latter; or may serve, at least, as a friendly caution to those who are making gradual advances in vices of this kind, without reflecting upon their deceitful, insinuating, and encroaching nature.

We will then consider man, in the first place, as a creature endued with animal life, and furnished with all those sensations and appetites which are its necessary appendages. And here, before we proceed, it may be proper to observe, that, as they are born with us into the world, and are an essential part of our constitution, an imagination that the perfection of our being, in its present state, consists in I know not what annihilation and extirpation of them, is mere enthusiasm, as contrary to the sentiments of reason, as of nature. This degree of perfection we cannot attain to, until *this corruptible shall have put on incorruption*. If, in this degenerate condition of humanity, they are too apt to be licentious and inordinate, all that is expected from our strength and discretion, is to watch over them with

care, to direct them to their proper objects, and to govern them with a prudent restraint; lest our natural desires should grow impetuous and headstrong, and run wild into sinful concupiscence. Let it be further remarked, that, when concupiscence itself is said to have the nature of sin, it is because it is an irregular tendency of the appetites, either desiring that which is not lawful, or pursuing that which is so, beyond the limits of reason and duty. Otherwise, the desires are natural, and therefore not criminal, and the gratification of them must be innocent, because it is necessary. We are placed by Providence in this world not only under a necessity of satisfying them for the support of life, but with a gracious permission to gratify them with some degree of indulgence beyond strict necessity, for the comfort and well-being of it. This would not have been the case, had there been no possibility for us to have satisfied our appetites with innocence. They are not, therefore, absolutely, and, in their own nature, sinful; but they are too apt to be the occasions and incitements to sin. Even good men may fall into their snare, through frailty or inadvertency; and, in this case, they cannot but feel and lament, as they will be allowed to offer in plea at the great tribunal, the infirmities of human nature. But as for those, who submit to their dominion without reluctance, and joyfully obey the call of every vicious inclination, let them not vainly impute that guilt to an original depravity, which is an acquired corruption; nor charge those miseries to the account of nature, which are strictly and properly their own.

And here, indeed, it is, in the early prevalence of education and habit, that our infelicity begins. For, were we accustomed from the beginning to live according to nature, we should find the appetites, in themselves, reasonable and modest; asking little, satisfied with little; but, like favourite children, they are soon corrupted by indulgence, and, being trained up in the school of luxury, they find many wants which are not natural to them: being accustomed to be humoured, they become restless and importunate, and grow upon us in their demands by every compliance. It is evident, therefore, that every unreasonable gratification is only raising a new desire, and while it seems to

to appease the appetites, irritates them the more. Could we, therefore, lay an early restraint upon them, and learn to gratify them no farther than God and nature allow, it would be the way to avoid much trouble and disquietude; we should be less solicited, and they would be more contented.

Add to this, that, when they have thus gained strength and vigour, and their wants multiply upon them through indulgence, then they soon grow wanton and fantastical; are roving from pleasure to pleasure; tired with the present enjoyment, and eagerly exploring and pursuing fresh objects of delight: so that we are in a state of perpetual agitation and uneasiness, not only from the violence of our desires, but from the frowardness and inconstancy of their humour. And what is still more, and cannot but necessarily happen, we must feel in proportion to the cravings of our irregular appetites, impatience and fretfulness from difficulties and delays, and vexation from frequent disappointments. Such are the disagreeable sensations that embitter the life of a voluptuary, and multiply with the increase of his pleasures.

As the scene opens upon us, it grows far more distressful. The appetites have been long indulged; they have the mastery; they have now the reins in their hands; and are hastening to put a final period to all the pleasurable sensations of their votaries, even by such means as must be continually extinguishing and deadening the very sensation itself. For an unwearied application to pleasures fatiates and surfeits, rather than satisfies; it weakens the tone of the animal powers, and wears them gradually into disrelish, and perhaps into disuse, even before the course of nature brings on the years, *when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.* Enjoyments of this kind must be destructive of themselves, because they impair and destroy that quickness of the faculties, and that health of constitution, upon which their very nature depends. When the senses themselves grow dull, and wear away, the pleasures of them must of necessity be languid. And yet such is the peculiar infatuation of the voluptuous man, and, what would be utterly incredible, did not every day's observation confirm the truth of it, in many a fatal instance, so absolute is their dominion,

so strong is their enchantment, that though they chastise him with pain and diseases, and bring on the daily decay of health and strength, with trembling nerves and faltering steps, he crawls on in the same slippery path, till he falls and drops into the grave.

For the truth of the foregoing observations, we may appeal to experience. Inquire of those who have led a life of pleasure, as it is falsely called, whether, in respect of self-enjoyment, it be indeed preferable to a life of temperance and regularity. Ask the sensualist, who says, *there is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink*, and whose happiness depends upon the unwilling returns of a jaded appetite, whether that compound of high and delicate meats which luxury improved into an art can supply, be not an offence to the stomach, a load to the constitution, and poison to the health. Whereas the man that is not surfeited with intemperance, finds an enjoyment in his frugal repasts, which artifice cannot give: he has no loathings of the appetite, no oppression of spirits; his sleep is sweet; he *eats the labour of his hands*, and finds that the bread of industry and temperance is far more delicious than the dainties of indolent luxury. Or *those that sit long at the wine*, what real pleasure do they find in that nausea and sickness, that relaxation and feebleness of body, which excess never fails to create? *Look not thou upon the wine when it is red*, says the wise man, *when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright: at the last, it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.* (Prov. xxiii. 31.) Ask the libidinous man; nay, rather, does not his very appearance declare, that lawless pleasures are dearly bought; and that he has reason, in the bitterness of his soul, to curse those impurities, which prey upon the constitution, and are *rottenness to the bones*; which make youth decrepid, and hasten on an early and unnatural old age? It is difficult to mention this vice, and the foul train of miseries that attend it, in a decent and inoffensive manner: let me therefore close this branch of my discourse in the words of high and sacred authority, that will command your reverence and awe: *I beheld*, says Solomon, *among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding. And behold! there met him a woman with the attire of an*

an harlot, and subtle of heart. With her much fair speech she caused him to yield; with the flattering of her lips she forced him. He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks: till a dart strike through his liver, as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life. (Prov. vii. 7. 9. 21, 22, 23.) Remove thy way, therefore, far from a strange woman, and come not nigh the door of her house; lest thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, and say, how have I hated instruction, and despised reproof? (Prov. v. 8. 11, 12.)

I have been hitherto speaking to the sensualist as a creature possessed of animal life, and furnished with those appetites which are its necessary appendages; and have shewn the expediency of his putting a curb and restraint upon them, while possibly they may bear it, even upon his own principles, for the sake of preserving that very nature, upon which all his pleasurable sensations depend. But he must likewise consider himself, however unwilling he may seem to do so, as a being of a much higher order, as one endued with the superior power of reason and understanding. Let our next inquiry, therefore, be, in what manner an intemperate pursuit of sensual pleasures must affect the intellectual part of us, which raises us far above the brutal life, even to a participation of the angelic nature.

And here the first consideration that offers itself, arises, in some measure, from the foregoing ones, and results from that union of our souls and bodies, by which, in our present state, they mutually act upon each other, and sympathize in each other's affections. Hence, as any violent or continued disorder in the mind introduces a languid indisposition in our bodily frame, so the infirmities of the body do reciprocally enfeeble and dispirit the mind. If, therefore, an assiduous application to sensual pleasures does certainly impair our bodily health and strength, it will proportionably waste the health and strength of the mind: it is not possible, where incontinence, riot, and luxury, have enervated the constitution, the soul should still retain its vigour, or have elasticity enough to exert itself in speculation or action. View but the man of pleasures, after a few years spent in the

pursuit of them, and behold! frequently in the end, what insupportable dejection, what gloominess and horrors overshadow and sit heavy upon his soul!

But this is not all: Sensual pleasures are hurtful to the mind other ways than by depressing it; and the mischief they do is often felt in the intellectual faculties, even before it is derived from the constitution. They shut out, in the first place, the necessary supplies of knowledge, which is the food and nourishment of the understanding, and without which it cannot grow up to its full proportion and maturity. For an advancement in knowledge supposes discipline, application, assiduity, labour; exercises, which are directly opposite to the whole scope and system of the man of pleasures; who cannot well be thought to have either leisure or inclination for such painful employments. For painful they must be to those who can have little taste or relish for the pleasures of the understanding, which are of a quite different and superior kind to those of sense, and to which it must seem against nature for them to rise, who wallow in the mire, and are entangled in sensuality. By this means, through the want of cultivation and improvement, the intellectuals lose their ability, and grow unserviceable by too little use, as the senses decay and are worn out by too much.

Add to this, that sensual pleasures are directly injurious to the very essence of the mind, and maim it in all its faculties; so as to frustrate, in a great measure, any degree of application, could we be supposed to make use of it. It is with the constitution of the mind as of the body; no strength of it can withstand the repeated assaults of intemperance and excess. They spread a torpor, as it were, over the rational soul, and render it impotent in all its functions. The ferment of wine, and the fire of lust, raise an impure vapour in the brain, which overclouds and darkens the understanding. The imagination, that admirable faculty, whose proper employment it is to bring into our view all the wonderful and beautiful scenes of the creation, is no longer the hand-maid of reason, but the creature of our appetites. This fair mirror is blotted over with the traces of foul desire, and every avenue is shut up against the admission of any object that might po-

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lish and refine it. Invention cannot expatiate, because it cannot break loose from those earthly, sensual incumbrances which oppress it. The memory becomes impaired; nor would it be any great misfortune, should it be entirely obliterated, since it is at best but the storehouse of sensuality and impurity; nor has contemplation laid up there any treasures that can deserve a review. No time has been employed in the exercise of thought and reflection; whence arises not only an impatience, but an inability, of thinking. In short, the rational part of the voluptuous man is incorporated, as it were, into the animal one; all his thoughts are the thoughts of his heart, and are, like that, sensual and polluted; prompted, directed, and circumscribed, by the appetites. This is by no means an imaginary representation; on the contrary, they are the observations of common experience: for how often have we seen and lamented, that the brightest natural parts have fallen a victim to pleasures, having been devoted to their service and command, till they have been gradually worn away, and have been utterly stupified and lost?

Here doubtless the libertine will be ready, with an air of triumph, to ask, where else is to be found that gaiety and sprightliness, that flow of mirth, and those sallies of wit, which enliven the conversation of the men of pleasure, beyond all that temperance and sobriety can pretend to? Does this argue the want or decay of parts; is it not rather a proof of their energy and vivacity? Be it so. But, alas! all this boasted fire is, in the Scripture language, *like the crackling of thorns under a pot* (Eccles. vii. 6.): so long as the fuel continues to be supplied, it may raise violent ebullitions; it may give a glaring light; but it is all the while raging, noisy, and self-consuming: it is a flame that is rather scorching, than refreshing; and how soon is it extinguished, and leaves no remains but ashes! To quit the metaphor—This liveliness of wit, as it is called, is seldom rational, or reconcileable to good sense or decency: it is not the offspring of the understanding; and the passions themselves must be either vitiated or inflamed to have a relish for it. For what is it after all, but either the extravagance and phrenzy of an over-heated fancy, or the offensive impurity of a debauched one? Is it the voice of that serene per-

manent joy which is in the dwellings of the righteous; the companion of wisdom and virtue? Can it exist but in the midst of laughter and folly? Or will it bear the review of one moment's cool reflection? And when the raving of this fever-fit is over, does it not end in weariness, faintness, and remorse? So that, upon the whole, we have little reason either to envy or imitate the gayest and wittiest debaucheries of the men of pleasure; though much it is to be feared, that some few pernicious examples in this kind have been the most prevailing inducements to unexperienced youth to run with an absurd emulation into the same excess of riot with themselves. But ought they not rather to be looked upon as so many lights to warn us of our danger, and prevent our splitting upon the rock, than to steer by in the course of life, if perchance there are some rare and illustrious instances of such uncommon talents, as a licentious and profligate life cannot easily get the better of? It appears, they cannot indeed altogether extinguish them, they can only abuse and prostitute them; prostitute those gifts which were bestowed upon them for the glory of God, and for the honour of human nature, even to the vilest purposes of obscenity, immorality, and profaneness. But is not this, in effect, the worst way of losing our understanding, thus infamously to degrade and disgrace it?

This ascendancy of the appetites over our intellectual faculties, generally brings on, sooner or later, the last and greatest injury they can receive, in the lowest and most scandalous prostitution of them; namely, when all that remains of our reason is solely employed to cater for and pamper the appetites; when it has lost all authority and rule, and is become the mere vile instrument of that blind impulse which it was born to govern, direct, and control. Little do we deserve the name of reasonable creatures, when, by an unaccountable inversion of the order of nature, the appetites have at length, by continual incroachment, gained an absolute sovereignty, and the master is become the slave. Then when our reason is led captive of our lusts, no creature is less rational than man: *When the light which is in us is darkness, how great is that darkness?* Instead of order and harmony, and the peace of a regular self-government,

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the whole frame of our being is out of proportion, and what can be the effect of such anarchy but confusion, and every evil work?

But this reflection suggests the latter part of my inquiry, namely, how an intemperate indulgence in sensual pleasures must affect a man in his moral and religious capacity.

I have already observed, that there may be an innocent and lawful, as well as an irregular and criminal gratification of the appetites; and therefore, to assert with a stoical severity, that pleasure arising from the senses, can have no possible intercourse or communion with the virtues, and that, to think of introducing it as a companion to them, is *tantumquam meretricem in matronarum cœtum adducere* (Cic. de Fin. lib. ii.), is neither serviceable to the cause of virtue, nor agreeable to reason and truth. On the contrary, the good providence of God has so disposed the general plan of this world, that, in order to subdue the natural desires to the interest of virtue, which has, in the ordinary appointment of things, the promise of this life, as well as that which is to come, men have never, upon the whole, so real and sincere an enjoyment of pleasures as when they are innocent. But then it must be allowed, that unless we use great circumspection, and are carefully upon our guard, they are extremely apt to become the baits and allurements to evil, and to seduce us gradually into a dissolute and irregular course of life, fatal to every moral virtue, and fruitful of almost every vice.

For when men, as in this case, become once habituated to take their estimate of good and evil from the mere animal sensations, (for vicious pleasures are as great corrupters of principles as of practice,) they have not in them the root and origin of virtue; they have extinguished all moral taste, all relish of sublime and spiritual pleasures, without which it is impossible that any habit of virtue can fix itself in the soul. To become virtuous, we must find a pleasure in being so; and every pleasure must have its faculty of perception suited and adapted to it; and we are no more capable of moral pleasures without a virtuous disposition, than of animal gratifications without the senses. Or could a principle of virtue be supposed to subsist in the sensualist, how could it

exert itself in action, or what possible employment could it find there? For what is the chief business of virtue but to discipline, control and govern the appetites and the animal passions; to alluage the violence of their current; and to deduce and gently lead them in their proper channels? But is a moderation of desires, is the government of the appetites, to be found in men whose very profession it is to inflame them? What! shall we look for abstemiousness in the drunkard, or for continence in the adulterer?

We may go on to observe, that a voluptuous life is not only at variance with every act of personal conduct and self-government, but is likewise found to have little fellowship or alliance with any kind or degree of social virtue. There is as natural a connection between the several sorts of the vices as of the virtues; and the gradation is as easy from the one to the other; so that we need not wonder, if those that have indulged themselves in the vices of concupiscence, should soon make the rest familiar to them. They that cannot regulate their appetites, will be as little able to govern the passions that are excited and inflamed by them; and when these, in each other's aid and assistance, demand to be gratified, what opposite principle shall we seek for to counteract and repress their united force? Shall we expect to find in the voluptuary the kind beneficent sentiments of humanity? No. Self-indulgence centers in itself; hates all avocation from pleasures; turns away its face from the sight of misery, or hardens itself to behold it without sympathy: it is not grieved for the affliction of Joseph; but it can abundantly create the distress which it cannot feel. Does he possess the useful virtues of the generous neighbour, or the disinterested ones of the faithful friend? On the contrary, where do we find, that the man inflamed with wine, or transported with lust, is at all apt to consider whom he offends, or whom he injures; whose reputation he wounds, or whose peace he destroys; whose confidence he abuses, or whose innocence he betrays; what friendship he violates, or what enmities he creates? Nay, is he not frequently seen to break through the strongest ties, even of natural affection itself; for what degree of it can he be supposed to retain who abandons himself to vices, which must certainly

certainly waste his fortune, as well as his health, and too often entail upon his unhappy descendants infamy, poverty and diseases? Or, in short, can he be in any respect a useful member of the community, when voluptuousness is so evidently destructive of all social happiness, as it eradicates all those virtues which are the support and strength of society, and ushers in all those vices which disorder, enfeeble, and, should they become epidemical, must dissolve it? For as industry and frugality are nursed by temperance, so a prostitution to pleasures engenders sloth and luxury, and must be fed by extravagance; and as that cannot long be supported by integrity and honesty, the great pillars of civil society, it will support itself by force and fraud, and every act of injustice. *From whence, says St. James, come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts?* (James, iv. 1.) And in the catalogue of the works of the flesh enumerated by St. Paul, to adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, succeed hatred, variance, emulation, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders. (Gal. v. 19, 20, 21.) *And who hath woe? says the wise man, who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? They that tarry long at the wine, they that go to seek mixt wine.* (Prov. xxiii. 29, 30.)

Let us advance yet one step further, to see what ruin and desolation is made by an irregular indulgence in sensual pleasures in the highest attainment of man's nature, the Christian life. And if it has been made appear that such an indulgence does greatly enervate and corrupt the mind in its mere natural and moral state, how much more must it war against and wound the soul in its spiritual one? A voluptuous life is at variance with the very essence of the Christian institution; the great end and design of which was to rescue us from the dominion of our lusts, to spiritualize our affections, and to purify our nature by the means of grace, that we might be vessels of honour, sanctified and prepared for glory. It is the first engagement we enter into upon our admission into the Christian covenant by baptism, "that we renounce all carnal desires of the flesh, so that we will not follow nor be led by them." The external rite is the emblem of purity; and

by the inward operation of it we are dedicated as holy unto God: *Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost, who cannot inhabit impurity and corruption.* In consequence of this, the works of the flesh are constantly set in opposition to the works of the spirit; and the carnal mind is represented as enmity against God; *for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.* (Rom. viii. 7.) *For the flesh* (says the same Apostle), *lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other.* (Gal. v. 17.) So that there is no reconciling the profession of the spiritual religion of Christ with an indulgence in sensual lusts; as there is not a single Christian grace that can take root and grow in our hearts, unless they are first purified from all evil and corrupt affections, from every impure and inordinate desire: but, *if a man purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared for every good work.* (2 Tim. ii. 21.) Prepared for the reception of every virtue and grace that can adorn the Christian in this life; and prepared for the exaltation and reward of them in a better. For indeed this purity of heart which our religion requires of us is no more than what is absolutely necessary to qualify us for heaven, and cannot be dispensed with from the very nature of the happiness that is there to be revealed. The kingdom of glory is a spiritual kingdom; and all the enjoyments of it are of a spiritual nature; and they who will be partakers of them must first endeavour to acquire a relish and savour of things spiritual, and must begin their preparations for heaven by cultivating those graces which they shall exercise hereafter, and by restraining those appetites which can meet with no gratification there. It is a notion to which the light of nature carried several of the more exalted Heathens, and which many eminent Christian writers have thought not disagreeable to the revealed notices of a future state, that the vicious inclinations which the soul contracts in the body through habits of lust and sensuality, and their consequent train of vices, do insinuate themselves into the very substance of the soul, and adhere to it, like a leprosy, in its separate state. In this light it appears, that the sensualist cannot partake

of the joys of heaven, not only through an exclusion from them by a moral decree, but through an inability to taste them from a natural incapacity; and that, with all his depraved appetites about him, he could have no sense of the pleasures of heaven were he placed there. But however that may be, this is certain—that he will never be put to the trial. Whether the inclinations themselves subsist in the soul or not, we know at least the guilt which they communicate will inseparably cleave to it for ever; and no pollution will ever be admitted into the presence of God, who is of purer eyes than to behold impurity: He placeth before his throne those only that are in the white robes of righteousness; but neither drunkards, nor adulterers, nor fornicators, nor unclean persons, can have any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

I have now gone through the several considerations I purposed to lay before you, in order to shew what fatal mischiefs and irretrievable ruin an intemperate pursuit of sensual pleasures brings upon the whole man, in every stage and condition of his being. And certainly they must have great weight with all that retain any sense of the dignity and perfection of human nature; that have any regard for their health and peace; for the regular enjoyment of their faculties; for the improvement of their understanding; for their increase in virtue; in short, that have any true relish for happiness in this world, or expectations of bliss in that which is to come. These indeed are considerations of general concern, and affect all orders and degrees of men and of Christians. But there is something so peculiar in the circumstances of a learned and religious education, and the topics of this discourse may be applied with such singular propriety and force to those who have the advantages of it, that I shall entreat your patience and attention a little longer, while I make this special application, which, I trust, may prove as useful as it is apposite.

From a thorough insight into human nature, with a watchful eye and kind attention to the vanity and intemperate heat of youth, with well-weighed measures for the advancement of all useful literature and the continual support and increase of virtue and piety, have the

wise and religious institutors of the rules of conduct and government in places of education, done all that human prudence could do, to promote the most excellent and beneficial design, by the most rational and well-concerted means. They first laid the foundation well, in the discipline and regulation of the appetites. They put them under the restraint of wholesome and frugal rules, to place them out of the reach of intemperance, and to preclude an excess that would serve only to corrupt, inflame and torment them. They are fed with food convenient for them; with simplicity yet sufficiency; with a kind though cautious hand. By this means the seeds of vice are stifled in their birth; young persons are here removed from temptations, to which others from a less happy situation are too frequently exposed; and by an early habit of temperance and self-command they may learn either to prevent all irregular solicitations, or with ease to control them. Happy are they, who by a thankful enjoyment of these advantages, and a willing compliance with these rules, lay up in store for the rest of their life, virtue, health, and peace!

Vain indeed would be the expectation of any real progress in intellectual and moral improvements, were not the foundation thus laid in strict regularity and temperance; were the sensual appetites to be pampered in youth, or even vitiated with that degree of indulgence which an extravagant world may allow and call elegance, but in a place of education would be downright luxury. The taste of sensual pleasures must be checked and abated in them, that they may acquire a relish of the more sublime pleasures that result from reason and religion; that they may pursue them with effect, and enjoy them without avocation. And have they not in this place every motive, assistance and encouragement to engage them in a virtuous and moral life, and to animate them in the attainment of useful learning? What rank or condition of youth is there that has not daily and hourly opportunities of laying in supplies of knowledge and virtue, that will in every station of life be equally serviceable and ornamental to themselves, and beneficial to mankind?

And shall any one dare to convert this house of discipline and learning, into a house of dissoluteness, extravagance, and

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riot? With what an aggravation of guilt do they load themselves, who at the same time that they are pursuing their own unhappiness, sacrilegiously break through all the fences of good order and government, and by their practice, seducement and example, do what in them lies to introduce into these schools of frugality, sobriety, and temperance, all the mad vices and vain gaieties of a licentious and voluptuous age? What have they to answer for, who, while they profligately squander away that most precious part of time, which is the only season of application and improvement, to their own irretrievable loss, encourage one another in an idle and sensual course of life, and by spreading wide the contagion reflect a scandal upon, and strive to bring into public disesteem, the place of their education, where industry, literature, virtue, decency, and whatever else is praiseworthy, did for ages flourish and abound? Is this the genuine fruit of the pious care of our ancestors for the security and propagation of religion and good manners to the latest posterity? Is this at last the reward of their munificence? or does this conduct correspond with their views, or with the just expectations and demands of your friends and your country?

Nor let any one vainly imagine, that the time and valuable opportunities, which are now lost, can hereafter be recalled at will; or that he, who has run out his youthful days in dissipation and pleasure, will have it in his power to stop when he pleases, and make a wiser use of his riper years. Yet this is too generally the fallacious hope that flatters the youth in his sensual indulgences, and leads him insensibly on in the treacherous ways of vice, till it is now too late to return. There are few who at once plunge so totally immerse in pleasures as to drown at once all power of reason and conscience. They promise themselves that they can indulge their appetites to such a point only, and can check and turn them back when they have run their allotted race. I do not indeed say that there never have been persons in whom the strong ferment of youthful lusts may have happily subsided, and who may have brought forth fruits of amendment and displayed many eminent virtues. God forbid! that even the most licentious vices of youth should be absolutely incorrigible. But I may venture

to affirm, that the instances in this case have been so rare, that it is very dangerous for any one to trust to the experiment upon a presumption that he shall add to the number. The only sure way to make any proficiency in a virtuous life is to set out in it betimes. It is then, when our inclinations are trained upon the way that they should lead us, that custom soon makes the best habits the most agreeable; the ways of wisdom become the ways of pleasantness, and every step we advance they grow more easy and more delightful. But on the contrary, when vicious head-strong appetites are to be reclaimed, and inveterate habits to be corrected, what security can we give ourselves that we shall have either inclination, resolution, or power, to stop, and turn back, and recover the right way from which we have so long and so widely wandered, and enter upon a new life, when perhaps our strength now faileth us, and we know not how near we may be to our journey's end?

These reflections I have suggested principally for the sake of those, who allowing themselves in greater indulgences than are consistent with a liberal and virtuous education, give evident proofs that they are not sufficiently aware of the dangerous encroachments and the peculiar deceitfulness of pleasurable sin. Happy for them! would they once seriously consider their ways; and no time can be more proper than when these solemn seasons of recollection and religious discipline should particularly dispose them to seriousness and thought. They would then discover, that though they are a while carried gently and supinely down the smooth stream of pleasure, yet soon the torrent will grow too violent to be stemmed; the waves will arise, and dash them upon rocks or sink them in whirlpools. It is therefore the part of prudence to stop short while they may; and to divert their course into a different channel, which, whatever obstructions and difficulties they may labour with at first, will every day become more practicable and pleasing, and will assuredly carry them to a serene and secure haven. But if neither the apprehension of the dangers, anxieties, and miseries, that are the sure attendants upon vice and voluptuousness in this life, can awaken their fears; nor the assurance of that calm self-possession,

that regular enjoyment of all the faculties of body and mind, that health, peace, and joy, which are the associates of temperance and virtue, can win upon their inclinations; then—*Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee, in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgement.* (Eccles. xi. 9.)

SERMON III.

The Excellence of the Christian Morality.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, at Christ Church, Nov. 15th, 1761.]

PHIL. iv. 8.

Finally, Brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report: if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

THE Apostle has here given us in one view, a complete and beautiful system of the Christian morality. Such is the propriety and extent of the words he has made use of, as to express every essential virtue, and every ornamental grace. Not only the things that are true, and honest, and just, and pure, are recommended to us, but those likewise that are lovely and of good report. *If there be any virtue*—that we are to think upon and contemplate; to esteem and value it highly, and to fix it in our minds. But this, it seems, is not sufficient. We must go on to greater perfection; and *if there be any praise*; *Si quid cum virtute conjunctum, & laudabile est*, says Castalio upon the place: if there be any thing truly laudable, that is connected with virtue, and renders it amiable and graceful in the eyes of men—that likewise must be the object of our contemplation and pursuit.

In order to shew the extent and perfection of the Christian morals, I shall first inquire into the general nature of the virtues recited in my text.

And, secondly, I shall consider them under the advantages of that cultivation and improvement, which the Apostle recommends.

Upon a critical view of the passage before us, we shall find that St. Paul first

introduces to our notice the general principle of virtue; and then proceeds to a perfect and distinct enumeration of the several species of it, with that accuracy, which a careful and judicious reader may always discover in his writings. An examination into the sense of the words he makes use of, in the order in which they lie, will shew the justness of this remark.

First, then; whatsoever things are true, these we are to think upon, and implant in our minds, as the fixed principles of our conduct. Truth is the great foundation and test of morality. For which reason, we find in the most ancient writers, both sacred and profane, that it is a comprehensive name for the whole system of virtue; and a lie is often used as an equivalent term to vice. When the old heathen moralists would recommend a right and virtuous conduct, they advise men to pay the same regard to truth in actions as in words; to live a life of truth; to be no more guilty of a lie in practice than in conversation. And the Scriptures speak the same kind of language. In them, the great Creator himself is styled the God of truth; and his law is the truth. The Saviour of the world, who came to teach men the perfect will of God, calls himself *the truth and the life*: His divine doctrine is through the whole New Testament, called *the truth as it is in Jesus*; *the word of truth*; *the way of truth*; and *truth itself*. And, on the contrary, the wicked one, the original author of all evil principles and practices, is intitled the father of lies.

And there is a strict propriety in this kind of language. For all the moral virtues are of eternal truth and goodness, correspondent to the immutable nature and perfections of God, and invariable as the origin from which they are derived. And therefore it is certain, we may as well contradict the truth of things in practice, as deny it in speculation. Thus, for instance; if I neglect to pay any homage to God, and live in a presumptuous violation of his laws; is it not, in effect, to declare, that I, a dependent creature, owe him neither submission or obedience? which is absolutely false. If I refuse to acknowledge his mercies in the redemption of mankind by Christ Jesus; is it not the same thing as to say, that I wanted no assurance of pardon for my transgressions, no means of reconciliation to my offended God; or that I had no need

of an instructor or an assistant to lead me in the way of life? both which presumptions are undoubtedly contrary to truth: and as in these instances we disclaim the general principles of natural or revealed religion, so by every immoral action we contradict some particular truth. If I am guilty of injustice, I disallow the fixed maxim of equity, *in not doing to others, what I would they should do to me.* If I am ungrateful to my benefactor, I deny that kindness deserves a requital: and if I am intemperate and voluptuous, I plainly declare, that there is no occasion for the appetites to be under the control and guidance of the superior faculty of reason. In short, whenever we deviate from virtue, we adopt some false principle or maxim, as the governing rule of our actions in that instance; whereas truth is the one invariable standard, to which we are obliged to conform, by making the course of our life and manners correspondent to the will of God; suitable to that state and order of things which he has constituted in nature; and agreeable to our own frame and situation, to the relation we bear, and the various obligations we are under, to other beings. Thus we see, that virtue in general consists in the conformity of our actions to truth; and that St. Paul has prescribed to us an universal rule of life, taking in the whole compass of our moral conduct, when he says, *whatsoever things are true, think on these things.*

But he thought it not sufficient to define virtue in its general nature only; to give us a more distinct idea of it, he proceeds to recount its several species by a perfect and exact enumeration. These are comprehended in the following expressions: *whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure.*

The term honest in this place, though you allow it the same force as the Latin *honestum*, is very far from reaching the sense of the original word *Σέλιμος*, which is rendered in the margin of our bibles, with much more propriety, venerable: nor does even this word, in our language, come up to the full meaning of the original, unless you include in it the notion of what is sacred, on account of its relation to God. The root, whose signification it retains, properly imports an act of religious worship. *Σεβασμός*, a word

of the same origin, signifies the holy place where religious mysteries were celebrated. And a few instances will serve to shew that this sense is by no means foreign to the derivative of my text. The author of the second book of Maccabees expresses by it the majesty and sanctity of the temple: he uses it likewise as descriptive of the sabbath, calling it the most sacred day: he gives it as an epithet to their venerable and holy laws: and he ascribes it to God, as an attribute of his most holy and glorious name. To the same sense it is applied by the primitive ecclesiastical writers. One instance among many may serve for an example. Clement of Alexandria, speaking of image-worship, condemns the practice of it for this reason: because it infringes *τὴν σεμνότητα τῷ Θεῷ*; it is an encroachment upon the venerability of the Deity. From this use and sense of the original word, the precept of St. Paul will appear to have this meaning:—*Whatsoever is truly reverend and sacred, whatsoever, as such, is the proper object of your veneration, think on these things.*

Under this head therefore must, in a particular manner, be included all the duties we owe to God; all the offices of piety and religious worship. These necessarily arise from a contemplation of the adorable perfections of that infinite Being, who will for ever be the object of the highest degree of veneration to all rational creatures in the universe. A relative and subordinate veneration has likewise been paid in all ages and countries to every thing that has a connection with divine worship: for which reason, places and things dedicated to the service of God have always been esteemed sacred. *Δεῖ διακόνεας ὡσαύτως εἶναι σεμνούς*: the ministers of the gospel are to remember, that they likewise have a sacred and reverend character to support. When we are called upon therefore to think upon whatsoever things are venerable, we are excited especially to form in our minds the most awful sentiments of the majesty of God, and not to be wanting in the homage and duty we owe to him; in veneration of what belongs to him; or in any expressions of reverence in the performance of our religious adoration.

The Apostle having thus secured our regard to the first class of moral duties, namely, such as we owe to God, he

proceeds next to recommend those that are due to men—*Whatsoever things are just, think on these things.*—By this expression he denotes the general principles of justice and equity; and the offices that flow from these are of great variety and extent. An exact and scrupulous regard to the rights of others, with a deliberate and fixed purpose to preserve them upon all occasions inviolate, wherein the essence of justice consists, secures the practice of the whole system of social virtues. For the rights of men exact from us whatever they have a just and reasonable claim to in their persons, properties, and characters. It is a very low and imperfect kind of justice, merely to abstain from injuries. We must be active in the exercise of this virtue: as occasions and circumstances require, we must be just to the merits of men by commendation and favour: we must be just to their necessities by charitable relief: we must be just to their infirmities by candor and humanity. In short, the exercise of justice does not only exclude oppression and fraud, and the grosser kinds of iniquity, but it is inconsistent likewise with rigor and severity in the pursuit of our legal demands; with envious competitions, and undermining arts; with slander, detraction, and censoriousness; and with every thing that betrays a malevolent and ungenerous spirit. So that when St. Paul recommends to us *whatsoever things are just*, he recommends the practice of every virtue, that men can exercise towards each other, that has any tendency to establish or promote the welfare, regularity, or happiness, of society.

The remaining branch of moral virtue produces such as regard ourselves: and these are contained in the expression, *whatsoever things are pure.* This word perhaps, in its strict and primary sense, may be confined to the virtues of continence and chastity: but we may extend its signification farther, so as to import a strict abstinence from all such polluted pleasures, as are contrary to temperance in general; from all irregular gratifications whatsoever of the sensual appetites. For all irrational and base indulgences of this kind spread a defilement and taint over the soul, by enslaving it to gross conceptions, and blotting it with the traces of foul desires, and by that means rendering it utterly incapable of refine-

ment for any intellectual and spiritual employment. The Scriptures always speak of them in such a manner, as to shew, that whatever is contrary to a life of temperance, sobriety, and chastity, is pollution. Sensuality of every kind turns the man into the brute: it destroys the purity and sanctity of the rational nature; it profanes the temple of the Holy Ghost, and actually disqualifies us from rising to that exalted state of happiness in heaven, where nothing that defileth can make its approach.

St. Paul having thus far recommended to us the contemplation and pursuit of virtue, first under the character of its general nature, and then in the accurate distribution of it into its three great branches of piety, justice, and temperance; he proceeds, in the next place, to carry our virtues to their greatest improvement and perfection, by prescribing to us the cultivation of every thing that has a connection with them, so as to render them amiable and reputable: *Whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report—think on these things.* As if he had said; Pursue virtue upon its right principle; admit nothing into your practice but what is consistent with truth: and follow this, where it leads you, through the comprehensive division of the duties you owe to God, to men, and to yourselves. But be careful, at the same time, that you discharge these duties in such a manner as to throw a light upon your good works, adding grace to your virtues, and making them, as much as possible, the object of imitation and praise.

This is by no means an unnecessary addition to virtue; as will plainly appear, if we reflect upon the very different appearances it assumes from the manner in which it is practised. It is this which makes as great a distinction in moral behaviour as in civil; so that actions, founded on the same principle, shall in one view make virtue desirable and lovely, inviting the public regard; and, in another, shall make it unamiable and distasteful, deterring men from the pursuit of it, and forbidding them to embrace it.

How venerable, for instance, is the appearance of rational and manly piety, manifesting the inward sentiments of the heart in the performance of religious adorations,

adoration, by decent gesture, by a composed and serious deportment, by looks full of affiance, gratitude, and affection, where fervour is tempered with sobriety, and confidence with humility! Very different from this is the indolent and unanimated demeanor of some, and the enthusiastic air of others, who, though both may possibly have their thoughts fixed upon Heaven, yet certainly they neither of them contribute to make the beauty of holiness apparent in the public worship of God, but rather deaden or distort the genuine features of piety, by neglecting or overstraining the forms of it.

The case is the same with respect to the social virtues, which are very ill recommended by a cynical moroseness, or a stoical inflexibility. In what a different light are liberality and generosity seen, when the manner of conferring the benefaction shall either double the kindness, or shall make the person obliged out of humour, and almost unthankful for the favour he receives? Sincerity scarce appears to be the same virtue, when it expresses itself with an unbecoming freedom or an unguarded bluntness of speech, regarding neither persons nor seasons; and when it maintains the same regard to truth, with a civility and decency in words and actions. In short, we always do an injury to virtue, when we do not clothe it in a becoming dress, and give it all the advantages and lustre it is capable of receiving. Nay, in truth, we take away from its very essence, and hinder every good action from being the *res integra* that it ought to be, whenever we suffer any thing heterogeneous or disagreeable to its nature to be mixed with it. No man therefore should be contented with himself as a real lover and practiser of virtue, unless he aims to excel in virtue; which he cannot do, unless he makes a good life a graceful one, and performs every right action in the best and most becoming manner.

Tully, in his Book of Offices, is very particular in his observations upon the *honestum & decorum*; for this reason, because there is no time or situation of life, which has not a correspondent duty belonging to it; nor is there a duty without a certain decency accompanying it, by which every virtue it is joined to will appear to be doubled. And he recom-

mends the same harmonious exactness in the conduct of human life, as is required in musical compositions. In these, not only the grosser discords are avoided, but the least dissonance that would be offensive to the nicest ear. And therefore, says he, be careful to preserve the most minute accuracy and proportion in moral behaviour, as harmony in actions is much more excellent than in sounds.

The book of Proverbs and that of Ecclesiasticus abound with precepts and observations regarding these lesser moralities, as they have been called, but without which the greater ones cannot be complete. Rules of prudence and decorum are intermixed therein with those of the most essential duties; and wherever they are uniformly put in practice, the former will be a support and ornament to the latter, and will dignify and recommend the character of the moral and religious man.

Of the same kind likewise are those precepts of the New Testament, which require our behaviour to be such as *becometh* (or is ornamental to) *godliness*; which enjoin us to *abstain from all appearance of evil*—*not to let our good be evil-spoken of*—*to have our conversation honest*—and, *to provide things honest* (*καθα, beautiful*) *in the sight of all men*. These and such like passages plainly suppose, that even good actions may be performed in such a manner, as not only to lose that engaging lustre, which should make them appear lovely, and entitle them to reputation and praise, but even so as to give offence. And the same decorum, which must be observed, if we would give a beauty and perfection to our moral conduct, St. Paul likewise extends to our conversation; *let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt*. It is by this exactness of behaviour, governed by propriety and decency, as well as duty, that we obey the same Apostle's command, in *approving the things that are excellent*, and in *seeking to excel*: and by this *we adorn*, as it becomes us to do, *the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*; we arrive at that degree of Christian perfection required of us, as not only to be *blameless and harmless, without rebuke*, but to *shine as lights in the world*. For it is not enough for us to be innocent; we must likewise be exemplary: and virtue can never effectually recommend it-

self to imitation, unless it is *lovely and of good report*.

Indeed many great things have been very truly said of the native beauty and intrinsic charms of Virtue; but it is meant when they are properly displayed. For these certainly will appear to greater or less advantage, from the different light she is shewn in, and the dress that she wears. The more amiable and the fairer she is in her own genuine features and complexion, the more careful should we be to keep her clear from every blemish that will for that reason be the more visible, and will give the greater disgust. Certainly she loses much by a negligent and slovenly appearance; and she is disfigured by the trappings that affectation gives her; but it is no inconsiderable improvement that she receives from the neat and graceful attire she puts on, when Decency is her hand-maid.

Thus have I endeavoured to deduce from the words of my text the plan of Christian morality, which is constituted by the Apostle upon the eternal and immutable foundation of truth; and is expanded by him into the various branches that produce the virtues of every different species in their full extent, and under all the advantages they are capable of receiving from every thing that has an alliance with virtue, that can make it desirable and lovely in the eyes of men, the object of imitation and praise.

But wherein, you will say, does the Christian morality differ from the Pagan morality? Have not the heathen writers built theirs upon the same foundation? Have they not distinguished the several duties of it in the same manner? And have they not very strongly recommended that decorum of actions, which is so necessary to make virtue amiable? It is allowed, they have done all this: and yet the Christian morality may very justly claim the preference. The heathen sages laid their foundation well, when they established moral virtue upon truth. They would have done still better, could they have told us what truth was, and where it was to be found. But this they could not do, because they never discovered it themselves in many points of the greatest importance. They were shamefully ignorant in the first principle and ground-work of all morality. For it is certain, that the best and

wisest of them never arrived at such true notions of the Deity, as to think idolatrous worship unlawful. They offered sacrifices to false gods, according to the rites of their country, and were all idolaters—I do not except the great Socrates himself—they were all idolaters to a man. One sect of philosophers, of which many who had the greatest influence of power and authority professed themselves to be, absolutely rejected the providence of God: and those who allowed it, seem to have had but very dark and contracted notions of its real operation and constant interposition in all human events. Their notions of morality were likewise in other respects very imperfect or erroneous. Conceit and pride, angry disputation, and envious competition, and a furious contention for victory rather than truth, were virtues among the learned in the heathen world; whilst those of meekness and humility, so ornamental to human nature, and so agreeable to the condition of it, had no place either in their systems or their practice. On the contrary, a quick sense and resentment of injuries, and even a spirit of revenge, if not carried into execution by any mean and base methods, were deemed the marks of a noble mind. And in some cases and persons, that sacrilegious impiety of self-murder was applauded as the most heroic action. Then as to the vices of impurity; it is amazing, how licentious they were both in principle and practice, to the disgrace of human nature. Even the great Athenian legislator, when he restrained only the slaves of his community from the commission of the most unnatural and abominable of all vices, virtually permitted a free indulgence in it to the citizens, and established this great iniquity by law.

Very different from this is the truth, as it is in Jesus. He modelled his system of morality by the invariable standard of truth—the perfect will of God. By making this fully known to us, he has secured the worship of the one true God upon the basis of a rational piety, *in spirit and in truth*. He hath comforted and sustained us by the assurance of our being, every moment of our lives, under the kind and constant care of God's watchful providence; *without whose notice not a sparrow falleth unto the ground* and

and by whom *the hairs of our head are all numbered*. He hath taught us to extend our benevolence to enemies, as well as friends; to submit ourselves one to another; and to give the honour that is due to all men. He has laboured to inspire his disciples with the most perfect and exalted charity towards one another; a love that reaches to heaven as well as earth, and is the beginning of an eternal union, which neither death nor time can dissolve. Nor is there any virtue that can contribute to the real happiness of society, or to the inward peace and tranquillity of our own minds, that does not make a part of his divine religion. Resignation, contentment, humility, forgiveness, forbearance, meekness, gentleness, and goodness; every ornament of a quiet and inoffensive, unoffended spirit, is taken into the Christian morals. They give a perfection to every other virtue that can be named, and refine all the duties we owe to God, to man, and to ourselves. And hence we may observe, that the becoming and pleasing gratefulness of the good Christian's demeanour is not acquired from rules of decorum, that reach only to outward appearances, and teach the art of behaviour; but it springs from the very spirit of his religion, and grows upon the mild and gentle virtues that are peculiar to it as its natural fruit.

There is yet one thing more to be added, that must shew the perfection and sublimity of the Christian scheme of morality above any other, which is, that it has a respect to man, not merely as an inhabitant of this world, but as a citizen of heaven. It is for this reason, that it takes in many virtues as essential and ornamental to the Christian life, which were very little esteemed by the most moral heathens. Nor indeed could it be expected, that such virtues as consist in a generous disregard and contempt for the things of this world; in the mortification of our appetites; in the forgiveness of injuries upon a principle of religion, and many others, should be adopted by those, whose languid and uncertain hopes in a future state, left them too much under the influence of an attachment to the honours, riches, or pleasures, of this present life. Whereas the sure prospect of eternity, that animates every sincere believer in Christ, not only shews the reasonableness and propriety of those virtues, but makes

them practicable, easy, and delightful. The contemplation of the infinite mercy and love of God, so eminently displayed to him in his redemption, carries him with irresistible motives to the practice of every moral duty, and every Christian grace, that can purify his nature, and refine his manners; so as to make him a fit companion for angels and glorified saints in heaven, where the beauty of holiness is perfect without spot or blemish; and its everlasting happiness as complete as the presence of God can make it.

S E R M O N IV.

The Wisdom of Christ's Ministry.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, at Christ Church, Dec. 11th, 1763.]

LUKE, vii. 35.

But Wisdom is justified of all her children.

THE earliest and strongest prejudice that was conceived against the person and doctrine of our blessed Saviour, arose from his manner of intercourse and communication with mankind; which was thought to be unsuitable to the dignity of the character he had assumed. The wise men, both of the Jews and Gentiles, concurred in this opinion. For we find, the Scribes and Pharisees were offended at him, because they imagined, that a true prophet would never debase himself so much, as to mix with the multitude, and converse with publicans and sinners. And the chief objection insisted upon by Celsus and other learned heathens, in their opposition to Christianity, was founded upon this presumption: That he must be very ill qualified to be a teacher of wisdom, who could not rise above the meanness of his birth and education, but associated himself with the lowest and vilest of the people, amongst whom it was his ambition to make profelytes: from which circumstance alone, as they judged, a true estimate might be formed both of the character of the teacher, and of the value of his instructions. And yet, if we inquire into this matter with impartiality and attention, we shall discover the same divine wisdom in the method made use of by our Saviour in the publication of his doctrines, as evidently displays itself in the doctrines themselves; and there will ap-

pear a singular propriety and fitness in his choice of life and conversation, to promote the great business he had in hand, when he came into the world, and dwelt among us.

The consideration of my text will lead us to this subject; as you will clearly perceive, by looking into the connection it has with the foregoing verses.

Our blessed Lord had frequent occasions given him, of censuring the perverseness and obstinacy of his countrymen, who, though they wished for a prophet, and expected one, yet capriciously rejected those who had appeared in that character. *Whereunto, says he, shall I liken the men of this generation? They are like unto children sitting in the market-place, and saying, we have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not wept.* Whether the children played in mimicry of the sprightly music at the Jewish festivals, or of the mournful dirges at their funerals, their companions, it seems, were froward and peevish, and were not to be moved either with the mirthful or melancholy strains of their pipes. To these he resembles the Jews, in their reception both of John the Baptist and himself. The former they looked upon as a man possessed with an evil spirit, and mad, on account of the great austerities of his life: and the latter they treated with contempt, because he eat and drank in a familiar and friendly manner, even with persons of no great esteem. *For John the Baptist came neither eating bread, nor drinking wine, and ye say, he hath a devil: the Son of Man is come eating and drinking, and ye say, Behold! a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.* Then follow the words of my text, *but Wisdom is justified of all her children.* This was probably a proverbial expression in use among the Jews; and our Saviour, in his present application of it, may be understood to have spoken to this effect: In the execution of any important commission or office, wise men will put on such appearances as best become their character, and will use such means as are most likely to accomplish the design they have in view; and the event will abundantly justify and shew the wisdom of their proceedings. You were offended at the great self-denial and rigorous discipline of John the Baptist. But his manner of life was suitable to the bu-

siness he was sent to transact. He came to call men to repentance, as preparatory to the coming of Christ's kingdom; and proclaimed, as it were, a solemn fast; such as you are used to keep with great austerity, whenever you implore and expect any extraordinary deliverances you stand in need of. He himself set you the example, and therein acted prudently, and agreeably to his office. But my commission is of a different kind, and goes farther than his. I am sent by my Father to publish to the world the great reward of repentance, even the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life. I come to proclaim these glad tidings of salvation to all of you, and therefore I freely converse with you all; but especially to the poor; for they want comfort, and I am at hand to give it them; and to sinners; for they want pardon, and therefore I sit at meat with them, that I may invite them to receive it. My business is to promote the glory of God in the highest, on earth, peace, and good-will towards men; and I have chosen that way of life, which will most effectually promote them all: and the happy fruits of my conversation here, in turning many to righteousness, will prove to you, that I am guided by that wisdom which cometh from above.

When Jesus took upon himself the gracious office of being the Saviour of the world, while he lived upon earth, and before he made the atonement for transgressions, it was necessary, that he should offer to all men, and especially to those who were most ready to accept them, the conditions of pardon and salvation which he brought down from heaven; that he should instruct them in the doctrines and duties of that gospel which gave them the claim to eternal life; and that he should give convincing proofs of his divine mission, and the authority he had received to propose the terms of salvation to mankind, by the working of miracles. Such business as this was not to be transacted in secrecy and solitude, but required his appearance in the world, and a free conversation with all, to whom the glad tidings of the gospel were sent; with the rich and the poor, the rulers and the people; with those who thought themselves righteous, and those who confessed themselves to be sinners.

That the poor and sinful should be excluded from the care and concern of the blessed

blessed Jesus, who came down from the common Father of all men to be the Saviour of all, is unreasonable to imagine. They that want the comforts of this life, stand in greater need of the comforts that flow from the assurance of a better that is to come; and to those that groan under the heavy burthen of their sins, pardon and peace is most necessary and welcome. But why, you will say, was such partiality shewn, such preference given to these? Why did Christ so much disregard the rich, and seemed unconcerned about their salvation, whilst he was so anxious for that of the poor? It is a mistake to think that he was so. The gospel was preached to them also. The doctrines of it often reached the ears, and the miracles that bore witness to the authority of the teacher, were often wrought before the eyes of the Scribes and Pharisees, the rulers and chief men among the Jews. He frequently came in their way, went into their houses, sat with them at meat, and discoursed to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. When milder methods failed, he spoke to them on many occasions, publicly, with great freedom and sharpness; rebuking their hypocrisy and vices, and laying before them the sad consequences of their rejection of the Divine counsel. They many times came to him of their own accord, entered into conversation with him, and proposed their doubts and difficulties; not, indeed, for the sake of information, but with a malicious intent, that they might lay snares for him, and entangle him in his discourse. Nothing was wanting on our Saviour's part for their conviction and conversion. He not only spake to them as never man spake, but he wrought such mighty works before them as never man wrought. But all in vain; neither truth nor miracles could persuade them. When he had given sight to the man that was born blind, and he was publicly shewn to the Pharisees, and the cure could not be denied, this great miracle only confirmed them in their obstinacy; the poor man they put out of the synagogue, and Jesus they attempted to stone. When he had raised Lazarus from the dead, the chief priests and Pharisees met, confessed the miracle, and from that day forth took counsel to put him to death. And though all the miracles which he wrought carried in them the most visible marks of the

power of God, they blasphemously attributed them to the power of the devil, and wickedly treated the Son of God as the emissary of satan.

And now, can any man wonder that our blessed Lord should leave such incorrigible wretches as these to perish in their sins, and should make it his chief business and delight to carry the glad tidings of salvation to the poor, to publicans and sinners, who were willing to receive him? The pride of the Scribes and Pharisees represented this as mean and low behaviour, unworthy of the character he had assumed. But Jesus was superior to the little prejudices of pride, and had worthier notions of himself and of mankind. He rejected no offices of humility that the spirit of the Lord had anointed him to perform. He knew that he was sent to preach the gospel to the poor, and to bind up the broken-hearted. And no office could be more suitable to the goodness and humanity of his nature. He knew the value of an immortal soul; an inestimable treasure, though lodged in the meanest vessels. And no soul was to be lost, that he could raise from dejection, and purify from sin, and qualify for an inhabitant of heaven. How beneficent, how amiable, therefore, was the condescension of the Son of God, when he made himself of no reputation, and familiarly conversed with the poor and the miserable for such gracious and valuable purposes!

But still the proud Pharisee would invidiously judge of his character by his company. If he made the poor his companions, they despised him as one of mean education and low sentiments. If he conversed with publicans and sinners, they represented his manners to be like theirs; and if he sat down to eat and to drink with them, they charged him with sensual indulgence and excess. Never, surely, was any charge more ill-grounded or more malicious than this. He made the poor his friends, because they were meek in heart, and would gladly listen to those divine discourses of his, which inspired them with the most noble sentiments of virtue and piety, and which he recommended and enforced by his own spotless example. If he refused not the company and conversation of sinners, it was not to encourage them in their way of life, but to reclaim them from it, by giving them

the assurance of pardon upon their repentance and conversion, and by instructing them in the duties of religion. And when he moderately partook of their feasts and entertainments, it was to shew his approbation of social and friendly intercourse, which often gave him opportunity of raising useful lessons of instruction upon incidents that happened there. And, by this behaviour, he declared, that true religion is not cynical and morose, no enemy to innocent cheerfulness and rational joy, but is a promoter of peace upon earth, and of good-will amongst men.

Follow this friend of publicans and sinners on those occasions which have been turned to his reproach; observe his behaviour, and attend to his discourse. In the verse immediately following my text, we read, that *one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him.* He accepted the invitation; and a woman that was a sinner came into the house, *stood at his feet behind him, weeping, washed them with her tears, wiped them with the hairs of her head, kissed them, and anointed them with ointment.* Her Saviour received her as a true penitent; but the Pharisee looked with contempt both upon the woman as a sinner, and upon Jesus as no prophet, who admitted a sinner to approach him with such familiarity. Jesus knowing his thoughts, proposed to him a parable: *There was a certain creditor which had two debtors; the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty: and when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most?* The Pharisee answered, *I suppose he to whom he forgave most.* And he said unto him, *thou hast rightly judged.* Then he draws a comparison between the Pharisee's behaviour and the woman's, gives the preference to her faith and kindness, comforts her with an assurance of the forgiveness of her sins, and sends her away in peace. What divine love, what friendly rebuke, what instruction and persuasion, was in this discourse! and how happy would it have been for the Pharisee, to have had Jesus for his guest, if he had been wise enough to have improved by a conversation, which gave him so favourable an opportunity of laying hold on eternal life!

In like manner, wherever you find in the gospels, that our Saviour went into

those who invited him to eat and drink with them, and partook of the meat that perisheth; he gave them bread from heaven in exchange, and fed them with his divine doctrine. And if he made no scruple to accept the civility of publicans and sinners, such as the proud Pharisee would have disdained to converse with, he was doing his Father's business; he came to save that which was lost, and to engage sinners, by his condescension and love, to hear and receive the words of eternal life. He sat not at their tables for his own indulgence, but for their salvation: and the great feast to him was, not the taking care of the body, but the recovery of a soul from death. *My meat, says he, is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.*

In this demeanor of our blessed Lord, there appeared the most amiable goodness and endearing benevolence; and had not pride and prejudice blinded men's eyes, the greatness of his mind too therein had been no less conspicuous. For true greatness does not consist in being surrounded by pageantry and pomp, in keeping men at a distance, and exacting their homage and obeisance, but in gaining their affections and esteem, and that honour which gratitude will ever pay to the benefactors of mankind. This was the declaration of our Saviour to his disciples, when two of them desired to be advanced to a very high pre-eminence of dignity, and there was a strife amongst them all, who should be accounted the greatest. *Ye know, said he, that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them: but it shall not be so among you; but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister, and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.* By this, you see, that it is not power and authority considered in themselves, but merely as they are exerted for the good of mankind, that constitute true greatness: and the lower any person, be he ever so high, condescends to do good, the glory of his goodness shines so much the brighter. Jesus Christ was, both by his nature and his office, infinitely superior in power and dignity to the highest of the sons of men: yet he came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to manifest forth his glory by every good and gracious act of humility and condescension. And herein he displayed

displayed to the world the true and genuine appearance of the Son of God. God, who dwelleth on high, looketh down upon the whole race of mankind, protects them with his providence, and cherishes them with his blessings. But, in a particular manner, he declares himself to be a friend to the poor and needy, and a protector of the helpless, who flee to him for succour. Hear the words he spake of old by his prophet Isaiah: *Thus saith the High and Lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity; whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place; I dwell with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.* With these, likewise, the Son of God chose to dwell and to converse; instructing them by his doctrine, enlivening them by his promises, and tenderly embracing them with the arms of his mercy. And thereby he glorified God, and he glorified himself. Encircled with all the lustre of divine goodness, he appeared amongst men; and *we beheld his glory, says the beloved disciple, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Having thus shewed at large the expediency and propriety of the manner of our Saviour's intercourse with mankind, in the execution of the great work he had undertaken, I shall now lay before you an observation or two, founded upon this discourse.

And, first, It is obvious to reflect upon the remarkable and essential difference in our Saviour's method and design of communicating his doctrines to the world, and that of other teachers of religion.

The wise men and professors of science amongst the heathen, devised learned and artificial systems for the use of the studious and contemplative; nor were their real opinions as to the principal points of religion intrusted even to these, till after due preparation and trial. It was every where a prevailing maxim, which continued as long as the schools of the philosophers subsisted, "That the common people had no concern with religious truth."

In the place of which civil policy, for its own supposed advantage, supplied them with superstitious opinions and rites, and to these they were to be kept inviolably attached; nor could any teachers, with

impunity, venture to undeceive them. On this principle, Cicero himself, in the remains we have of his book of laws, gravely prescribes, as a statesman, a public institution of religion, which, as a philosopher, he despised and ridiculed. The manners, likewise, of the people were no farther regarded, than as they respected the good order of society: and if the laws could restrain them from noxious vices, it was sufficient; no methods were made use of to inspire them with sentiments of virtue upon the principles of morality and religion. Nor was the case much otherwise with the Jews. The Scribes and Pharisees had taken away from the people the key of knowledge, and instead of teaching them the commandments of God, had devised for them a religion more suitable, as they thought, to their servile nature and condition. *For they laid heavy burthens upon men's shoulders, which they themselves would not touch with one of their fingers.* Nay, we are told, that they did not scruple to avow a most impious tenet, "That the grace of God would not descend upon the poor, and that penury was a mark of reprobation." Such was the effect of the contemptuous opinion the wise men of the world had entertained of the bulk of mankind.

Our Saviour, you have seen, had different sentiments of them, and therefore he behaved towards them in a different manner. The children of the same common Father, and born with the same common endowments and capacities of nature, must all equally be the care of Heaven: and therefore he that came down from heaven, to gather into one fold all that would hearken to his voice, could not overlook those especially who were neglected and despised upon earth, and wandered as sheep without a shepherd, but were most ready to obey his call. And is not this proceeding such as might be expected from a teacher sent from God? Does it not indeed bear a strong testimony to the truth of his divine mission? As such, it is produced by our Saviour himself, in his answer to John the Baptist, who had sent two of his disciples to inquire of him whether he was the Christ or not: *Go, says he, and shew John again those things which you do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf*

deaf hear; the dead are raised up. Then he adds, as if it were a proof of his character, no less clear and convincing than that of miracles themselves; *and the poor have the gospel preached unto them.*

Secondly, We may observe how wisely our Saviour adapted his doctrines to the circumstances of the persons he was sent to instruct. If sinners were capable of receiving the gospel, and were so earnestly invited to receive it, then the dispensation of it must be such as is suitable to the condition of sinners. And such it appears to be from the uniform declaration of those Scriptures wherein it is contained: viz. That it is the dispensation of pardon and salvation to sinners upon their repentance. This was the very kind of religion that the whole sinful race of mankind stood in need of. But a religion of this kind must come from God alone: for we need not scruple to affirm, that the invaluable gift of eternal life to sinners upon repentance is a dispensation of mercy, that never was and never could be made known unto the world, but by him who had the authority of God himself to reveal it.

Again; if the poor and ignorant were capable of being instructed in the saving truths of the gospel, then the doctrines of it must be such, as lie within the reach of their apprehension and capacity. Accordingly we find, that our blessed Lord nowhere entertains his hearers with nice speculations upon abstruse subjects, which are neither essential to religion nor perhaps intelligible to the most improved understandings. He had a more important lesson to teach. He came down from heaven to bring life and immortality to public light by the gospel, and to make the way that leads to it plain to all men. And he took the only method that could carry this noble and extensive design into execution. For this purpose, he first establishes the authority of his divine mission by an amazing series of miracles publicly wrought; which is a kind of evidence decisive in its nature, and clear and convincing to men of all capacities. At the same time, he opens and explains the nature of his commission, proclaims a pardon for the sins of the whole world, and declares the conditions upon which it will be sealed to every man: which are those of faith, repentance, and obedience. And these are conditions which every

man, who has the use of his understanding, must allow to be both reasonable and necessary. For how can men avail themselves of a pardon from God, who refuse to receive the messenger that brings it, or to acknowledge the character with which God has invested him? Or how can they expect forgiveness of their sins, who are neither sensible of their guilt, nor sorry for having offended a merciful God, but continue to provoke him more and more? The duties he prescribes are such as approve themselves to the natural conscience of man, even where he gives new commandments, and extends the science of morality. And though he often throws the veil of parable over his instructions, yet it is so transparent, as not to conceal or darken them, but only gives grace to the truths they discover, and persuasion without offence. And if many of his hearers did not receive them, it was owing, not to a natural stupidity, but to a wilful perverseness; what they saw with their eyes they would not see, and what they heard with their ears they would not hear. And forasmuch as all the duties of religion must be built upon the certainty of a future state of retribution, and all men are equally concerned in this great event, the evidence of it ought to be such as is capable of giving conviction to all men. We find, therefore, in the Gospel no learned disquisitions concerning the nature and essence of the soul; nor is the doctrine of a future state established upon reasonings deduced from the immateriality of a spiritual substance. The circumstances of mankind must have been much altered, and perhaps their understanding too, before a religion founded upon such speculations as these could have been received in the world. Indeed the intricacy of this kind of argument, and the opposition of philosophers in the management of it, had greatly perplexed and weakened the common apprehensions of nature, concerning the state of a future existence: on the contrary, our Saviour confirmed, and improved them into the most sure and certain hope; laying this doctrine upon its true foundation, which cannot be shaken, that of the Divine power and will (for eternal life can be only the gift of God); and giving a sensible demonstration and pledge of a future state, wherein the whole man shall be restored to life, by the resurrection of him.

himself from the dead. Such was the gospel preached to the poor; and such is the evidence of its doctrines, level to the capacities of all men.

But you will say, Does this gospel propose to us no mysteries, no sublime and incomprehensible truths? Undoubtedly, there must be such in this wonderful and adorable dispensation of mercy: but they are equally such, both to the learned and unlearned; so that in respect of the comprehension of these mysteries, the scholar is no wiser than the mechanic. In another respect, greater degrees of knowledge concerning these matters may be expected from superior talents. The vain curiosity of some, desirous to be wise above that which is written; and the artful sophistry of others, desirous to invalidate that which is written; have made it necessary for men of learning, and especially the teachers of religion, to guard the true doctrines, delivered in Scripture upon these points, from such subtle and fallacious perversions, as do, in effect, overthrow or undermine the doctrine of man's redemption. But as the lower classes of people have neither leisure, nor opportunity, nor ability, to enter into disquisitions of this kind with any advantage, they may rest satisfied, that the knowledge which lies within their reach is as much as is necessary for their salvation. Faith in God the Father, as their creator and preserver; in God the Son, as their redeemer and judge; and in God the Holy Ghost, as their sanctifier and comforter, is a sufficient foundation for them to build their hopes of happiness upon in another life, and to support all those Christian duties which are required of them in this life; which are no other than what every reasonable man must understand and approve, and every sincere believer will, by the grace of God, be enabled to perform with satisfaction and delight.

Thirdly, From the manner of our Lord's conversation amongst men, we may discover the true spirit and temper of his divine religion; which is a perfect transcript of his own life. And it plainly appears, that ostentation, vain glory, and pride; supercilious neglect and ill treatment of our poorer brethren; conceit of superior righteousness, which despises those who are supposed to have made less attainments in religion; and all violent

methods made use of, under pretence of converting men to the truth; are utterly inconsistent with the principles and spirit of the gospel. On the contrary, kindness and benevolence, affability and condescension, a readiness to do all good offices to all men, especially to assist the poor in their necessities, and to convert the sinner from the error of his way, out of a principle of charity, and in the spirit of meekness, are the surest evidence we can give of a truly Christian temper.

Lastly, Let us consider the great inducement we have to put these Christian virtues in practice, from the consideration of our Saviour's example. *Ye call me, saith he to his disciples, Master and Lord; and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet.* Consider the dignity of our Lord's person and character, and you must own that it was in him the greatest condescension and humility, not to refuse even the lowest offices and services from which mankind could receive any instruction or advantage. But with ourselves the case is different. For though there is charity, no doubt, in the good offices we do one another, we cannot properly say there is humility in them. For what was an act of mere grace and favour in him, we owe to each other as a claim of debt. We all are brethren; we have one common Master, who has united us all in one common bond of charity. There is in this respect a perfect equality amongst us: there is neither high nor low, rich nor poor, since all earthly distinctions are lost in this consideration, that we are joint-partakers of the promises, and joint-heirs of eternal life.

Consider likewise, that whilst our blessed Saviour became the servant of the lowest of men, he wanted not the assistance of the highest. For though he graciously accepted the good-will and friendly offices of many that he conversed with, yet he was Lord of all; he had a right to the service of men and angels, and the whole creation was at his command. But we are poor and indigent, and weak and helpless. In mankind, there is a dependency one upon another, from the highest to the lowest. *The head cannot say to the feet, I have no need of you.* Therefore there ought to be a friendly intercourse betwixt all men, from the highest

highest to the lowest. And the example which our Saviour has given us in this respect, who wanted not the help of man, we have the stronger reason to imitate, who stand in constant need of the mutual services of each other.

Consider, in the last place, that our Lord, though he himself was without sin, was kind and compassionate to sinners. And shall not we, who are laden with iniquities, endeavour to ease one another's burthen, by gentleness, forbearance, forgiveness, exhortation, and comfort? Shall not we strive, as he did, in every labour of love, that can awaken the careless, reduce the wandering, rectify the prejudiced, encourage the penitent, animate the desponding, and reclaim the profligate sinner? By thus following the great example of our Master, we shall shew ourselves to be his servants indeed; and in due time we shall receive the reward of our services, even the recompense of eternal life.

S E R M O N V.

The Gospel Foundation of the Doctrine of a future State.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, at Christ Church, April 21st, 1765.]

2 TIM. i. 10.

Who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

IT has been deservedly admired in Cicero, as the mark of a noble mind, that amidst the various rival systems of philosophy, which divided the opinions of the learned heathens, he glories in giving the preference to those which asserted the dignity and vindicated the sublime views of human nature. So sweetly did the pleasing prospect of immortality captivate his imagination, that he declares he would rather choose to be in an error with those excellent persons that had opened to him the enchanting scene, should it prove in the end to be visionary and vain, than to be in the right with those minute philosophers, who could only rob him of this grateful delusion, and deceive him so much to his loss. But the truth is, the arguments of probability were on his side; and though they do not seem sufficiently powerful, to have wrought in him a perfect and steady con-

viction, yet certainly the arguments against this persuasion were much less of weight enough to engage a contrary assent, or make his judgement preponderate against the inclinations of his heart.

And can it be thought a less generous or laudable spirit in a Christian, to set an inestimable price upon that religion, and to glory and triumph in the profession of it, which has brought life and immortality to light; whose entire fabric is raised upon the certainty of this doctrine as its chief corner-stone; and which labours, by every motive that can affect every faculty of the soul, to inspire and animate its professors with the assurance of an eternal happiness? And might he not fairly put the trial of the truth and excellence of Christianity upon this single issue, That every other system of religion is found wanting, when weighed in the balance against that, which affords the most certain evidence, and gives us the clearest and most distinct prospect of a future immortal state? Justly may he say, Here will I hold; no subtle disputings shall beguile me of my hopes and my reward; nor will I be persuaded, that that religion did not come down from heaven, which carries all our thoughts and desires thither even in this life; and not only promises to us an everlasting inheritance in it hereafter, but has given us a most sure and sensible pledge, that our expectations will not be in vain, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The words of my text do contain, in the most express terms, a plain and positive declaration, that it was this divine person, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light. Death reigned in the world with an absolute and irresistible dominion. No man ever hoped to escape the grave, or pretended to the power of recalling the dead to life. Our blessed Saviour was the only person who presumed to disarm and vanquish this king of terrors, and set his captives free. By raising himself from the dead, he got himself the victory over this great enemy of mankind; and by this wonderful act of power, not as a private person, but as the representative of the human race, and in the name of us all, he took possession of immortality. This important victory, and the glorious consequences of it, he openly made known to the world, by the preaching of the gospel and the proofs that

that supported it: he brought life and immortality to light, by giving a sensible demonstration of the power and will of God in respect of our future state; by putting the evidence of it in such a light as all mankind might comprehend it and discern the force of it; by confirming the hopes of nature, which were too weak and uncertain; by rectifying and ratifying the decisions of reason, which had never brought men to any fixed and uniform opinion in this important doctrine; and by giving us more refined and exalted notions of the glories which will hereafter be revealed. The truth of these several assertions will appear more clearly and to greater advantage, if we take a survey of the foundations upon which the doctrine of a future state was built, before the coming of our Saviour, and examine into the strength of them, how far they were sufficient to support it.

There is certainly in human nature a capacity of looking beyond the limits of this world, accompanied with secret presages and hopes, that its existence may be extended farther than the duration of this life. And these natural endowments are the ground-work that support all our disquisitions into, and concerns for, futurity. Without the former, man would have no more notion of another life after this, than the brutes; and without the latter, it would be an uninteresting and fruitless speculation. But it is not sufficient, that nature has inspired us with a desire of looking into another world, when it has given us no capacities to make any discoveries in it; and the presages and hopes of being admitted there, are counter-balanced by a contrary instinct; by the fear of death, which is natural to all men; and by sense and experience, which universally shew, that the present nature of man is irrecoverably destroyed by death, which reduces this organized frame to dust and ashes. As a support therefore to the hopes of nature, those, that were not willing to part with them, would set themselves to consider, what encouragement and confirmation they might receive from such arguments as reason and reflection might supply.

In the first place, then, men of thought and discernment could not but observe, that the belief of a future state, under different conceptions of it, was universally diffused throughout all ages and coun-

tries; that this universal persuasion could never be obtained by any abstract method of reasoning, of which the generality of men are utterly incapable, but that the children received it in succession from the tradition of their fathers: and those, who were most curious in tracing it back to its source, would find in the accounts given of it by the earliest writers, that the higher they went in their inquiries, the clearer and stronger the tradition was. Hence it was reasonable to conclude, that it conveyed a doctrine coeval with the origin of mankind. And as this argument has been adopted by the ablest writers of antiquity, so there is great weight and force in it. The design of God in creating man must be supposed to have been disclosed to him. Consider him as made only for this mortal life, and he is so different a being from what he must be, if he is hereafter to have admission into an eternal state; his aims, his conduct, his duties, will so vary with his condition; that his Maker would never leave him in a state of uncertainty, in a matter of infinite moment, without the knowledge of which, he never could be able to take one step aright. And what was necessary for our first parents to know, was as necessary for their descendants. If they were taught that man was formed for immortality, and that the hopes of his nature would not be frustrated, notwithstanding the dissolution of his present frame, we cannot but suppose, that they would carefully communicate this important discovery to their children, and that it would be delivered down from one generation to another, through a succession of ages, as the invaluable inheritance to which they were born, and the only blessing that could sweeten the miseries of life.

It is reasonable however to suppose, that this doctrine would be most carefully propagated and most joyfully embraced by those families and nations, who adhered to the worship of the true God, and endeavoured to please him by a life of religion and virtue. It was indeed retained, though much weakened and corrupted, and but little regarded as a principle of action, by those who had revolted from the true religion. But among the righteous patriarchs it was preserved in its full force, through very few intervening generations, from Adam to Moses. And

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what is still more, the doctrine of a future life not only received additional confirmations in this period from divine revelation, but the mode or manner of it, by the resurrection from the dead, was typically exhibited to Abraham; and under this notion it was apprehended by the Jews (as plainly appears by the Scriptures), down to the coming of our Saviour.

But after all it is evident, that a tradition, secured by all these advantages, was now become insufficient to support the doctrine which it conveyed. The Sadducees, we know, rejected the notion of a future state under every conception of it, saying, that there was neither resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit. And even where the tradition was admitted, it seems to have been much changed from its original use and intention, and to have given rise to very different speculations from what it ought to have raised. This may be collected from the notion the Jews universally entertained of the temporal kingdom of the Messiah. The glories of his reign terminated in conquest and empire, and the great deliverance and salvation they expected, could no longer raise their thoughts or their desires to heaven.

After this we shall scarce imagine, that the traditional doctrine of a future state was preserved with more care and exactness amongst the heathen nations. On the contrary, it was so fantastically dressed up by the imagination of their poets, so disguised by fable, and made so absurd and incredible by the monstrous representations they gave of it, that all the wise men left it as a ridiculous delusion to the vulgar, and set themselves to inquire, what support this doctrine might receive from the powers of reason and the aids of philosophy.

I shall now follow them in their reasonings upon this subject; wherein you will discover indeed that they wanted not a foundation of truth; but then again, you will immediately see it either obscured with error, or intangled with inextricable difficulties. You will likewise perceive, that as Christianity comprehends every duty that natural religion can teach, so it adopts, confirms, improves, and disengages from perplexity, every real argument that natural reason can suggest, in support of the doctrine of an immortality.

First, The argument which seems to have been most laboured by the ancient

sages; who wrote before the coming of our Saviour (and they were the greatest masters of unassisted reason the world ever produced), was taken from the nature and essence of the human soul. From its innate activity and self-motion; from the powers of thought, reflection, and design; from its capacity of comprehending things present, retaining things past, and looking forward into things future; they saw it could not be formed from any mixture or concretion of the earthly elements; and therefore justly concluded it to be immaterial. They went on to infer, that as it was of a simple and uncompounded nature, it had not in itself the principles of dissolution and corruption, and therefore was immortal and divine. But this train of reasoning necessarily led them to assert, not only an eternal future duration, but an eternal pre-existence of the soul. They were obliged to maintain, that what from the constituent principles of its nature had no end, could have no beginning, and that what had a beginning must have an end. I shall not multiply authorities in evidence of this point; let one remarkable instance suffice: We have in Plato the discourse which Socrates is said to have made to his friends the very day of his death. In this he is comforting himself and them with a review of those arguments upon which he had erected his hopes of immortality. They have their foundation upon this supposed pre-existence of the soul, which he endeavours to confirm and support by these strange assertions—"That the mind received not its ideas and notions in the body, but brought them with it already acquired; that all thinking was recollection, and all our learning and knowledge was only the remembrance of what we knew before."

Is it not matter of equal grief and surprise, to see this great and good man standing upon the verge of this mortal life, and eagerly looking out for the assurances of a better state; to see him, I say, thus wretchedly amusing, rather than sustaining himself with such wild and improbable conceits as these? Would any pious or wise Christian be willing to exchange the grounds of his future expectations for reasonings of this kind? or will those that set the wisdom of Socrates in competition with that of the gospel pretend to say, that they are either intelligible to the illiterate, or satisfactory to the learned,

or

or in any degree sufficient to establish a rational belief of the only proper immortality, a self-conscious immortality, of the soul?

Reasonings of this kind are not to be found in the gospel. It was not the manner of our Saviour and his Apostles to philosophize about the nature and essence of the soul. Arguments from this topic lie too remote from common apprehension, and are perhaps not sufficiently clear and intelligible to the strongest and best-improved understanding. But the Scriptures even in this point have taught us a better method of reasoning. By these we learn, that God created and brought into existence every being in the universe. And what originally received its existence from his power, is by the same power preserved and upheld. We live and move in him who gave us our being. It is the great Creator alone who is essentially and necessarily eternal. He only hath life in himself, and he only can disperse it and continue it to his creatures. And whatever endowments of nature he bestows by his Almighty influence, he can at any time as certainly resume. Very excellent ones he has given unto man: he breathed into him the breath of life, and made him a living soul. There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty gave it him. Thus is he created after the image of God. This must give him great conceptions of his own nature, and is a declaration, that it was originally adapted to a state of immortality. But if the reasoner of this world, forgetful of his dependence, challenges it with a presumptuous pride, as the inherent privilege of nature, the good Christian will act upon truer principles of philosophy as well as religion, in being contented to receive it, as, what the Scriptures expressly declare it to be, *the gift of God*.

II. Another argument, which the venerable sages of antiquity called in to their assistance, is drawn from the self-conscious powers of the mind. They perceived in it great capacities, far more than commensurate to its present state and duration: they had a sentiment of its dignity; this world could not satisfy their ambition, and they had aspiring longings after immortality. Nay, there seems to have sprung up in the minds of some eminently virtuous Heathens something more, I mean, lively intimations and prelages of

a future happier existence, which may be considered as a divine testimony, working upon them with a greater power of conviction, than all the speculative conclusions of their reason! But these internal arguments could only operate with any degree of force in the sentiments of the good and the virtuous. For how did whole swarms of disputants arise, who opposed to the ambition and high pretensions of man his meanness and wretchedness! Were the noble faculties and capacities of the rational soul displayed, in proof of the dignity of man's nature, they confidently asserted, that he was but just master enough of reason to make him sensible of its weakness, and disobedient to its authority; that he was born and nurtured in ignorance and error; the slave of appetite and the sport of passion; vainly aspiring to greatness, but abandoned to misery; aiming at heaven, but chained down to the earth; and though pretending an alliance to celestial beings, of much nearer kindred to the brute. And indeed thus much we must allow—that this undeniable discord and contrariety in human nature was always a great embarrassment to the reasonings of the wisest Heathens upon this subject. We shall now see that it was revelation alone that could clear up this difficulty, by instructing us in what manner even the defects of man's nature wonderfully conspire with the excellencies of it in the proof of a future state.

This we could only learn, by being taught, what the Heathens never knew, that the present state of man is by no means his original and natural one; but that all his miseries are owing to an acquired degeneracy of nature. And the sense of them is so far from being a real discouragement and bar to him in his pretensions to immortality, that it is a reason and motive to animate him in the pursuit of it, and in recovering those high privileges, which he has indeed forfeited, but which, he is assured, are not irretrievable. Thus instructed, he will consider the present frame of his being as in ruins; but those very ruins demonstrate the original magnificence of the structure; and he will know, that this temple is still capable of being rebuilt and restored to its primitive glory: or, to use the language as well as the sentiment of the excellent Pascal, "The

greatness of man appears in his very miseries; the very sense of them proves the dignity of his nature; they are the miseries of a king dethroned." And if it seems probable, that some eminently virtuous Heathens had strong and enlivening presages of a happier state after this, with how much greater power of conviction may we suppose the Divine Spirit to bear witness in this persuasion with the spirit of every sincere Christian? For it is of this doctrine in particular, that those words of our blessed Saviour are most emphatically true, *if any man will do my will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.* He will feel in himself the assurance of a blessed immortality, as an ever-flowing spring of joy, which nothing but the spirit of truth can infuse; and the sentiments of his own heart will be an irresistible argument for the accomplishment of his expectations. If you call this enthusiasm, it is such as dwells only with reason and virtue, with sobriety and serenity of mind.

III. To the natural arguments made use of by the wise Heathens, in support of the doctrine of an immortality, we must add, in the last place, the moral one; such as arises from the consideration of a just and righteous Providence, and the evident unequal distribution of happiness and misery to virtue and vice in this world. This proof is certainly in its own nature strong and conclusive for a future state of retribution. But the force of it evidently depends upon having right notions of the nature of God and of providence. Where these were extremely defective and erroneous, as they generally were, the argument would lose much of its weight, would operate but faintly, and be but little attended to. And even many of those, who had more just and worthy sentiments of the divine nature and government, did not think of extending this argument to the proof of a permanent unchangeable immortality, though they thought it conclusive for a perpetually variable existence after death. Hence came that doctrine of the Egyptians, from whom it was transplanted into Greece, and even into Judæa, that the soul of man, after the body is destroyed, passes into another animal; and when it has gone through a long succession of them, after a round of migration performed in three thousand years,

enters into the body of a man again. It is obvious to observe, how such conclusions as these, the offspring of a wild imagination, must weaken the principles from whence they were drawn. There were indeed those that gave their heroes, men of renowned abilities and sublime virtues, a place among the gods; but where does it appear that heaven was proposed, by the philosophers, to the world in general, as lying within every man's reach, the object of his ambition, and the reward of private virtue? Of the proper moral evidence of a future state, as founded upon the divine attributes and God's righteous judgment of his creatures, and upon the notion of all mankind's being accountable to him, as their supreme judge; of an universal, eternal, unalterable, state of things, to be established upon the strictest principles of equity, with regard to every man's moral and religious behaviour, which will at once clear up all the dark scenes of Providence, and vindicate the ways of God to men; of this, how little is there to be found in the writings even of Plato or of Tully? But every Christian knows, that this doctrine is illustrated and enforced in almost every page of the Scriptures: and if after the diffusion of Christianity, even the Heathen philosophers managed this argument to more advantage, and the Christian theologists have carried it to its utmost improvement, this is a strong presumption how much the light of the gospel has in reality contributed to dispel the darkness in which the argument itself lay involved.

IV. But what strength of conviction do all these arguments receive from that triumphant proof of an immortality, which is the ground and pillar of our faith, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; given to us as a most sensible earnest and pledge, that we likewise shall all be made alive, to die no more; every man in his own order—Christ the first-fruits, afterward, they that are Christ's, at his coming? It does not fall within the compass of my discourse, or my design, to produce the strong evidence upon which the truth of this doctrine is established. There is the less occasion for it, as it has been often drawn out to view, and vindicated from all exceptions, by the most eminent writers. Let it suffice to observe, that upon

upon the certainty of the resurrection of Christ, the preachers of Christianity have established the doctrine of an immortality; and that it is in fact owing to the preaching of the gospel, that a rational and well-grounded belief of it has been so generally diffused throughout the world.

Great indeed was the opposition to, great was the contempt of, the doctrine of a resurrection, when it was first preached to those who had appropriated to themselves the character of learning and wisdom. But this was owing not more to their attachment to the false maxims and rudiments of their own philosophy, than to their misconceptions of the doctrine itself. They could not conceive by what principles of motion and mechanism, which were the only principles of formation they admitted, the body, after its dissolution, could be reorganised and re-united to the soul; or how a natural corruptible body could be made to inherit incorruption. And therefore, from the supposed impossibility of the thing, they ridiculed the reality of it. But, by degrees, the incontestible evidence of fact removed men's prejudices, and opened their understanding to receive the truths of the gospel. Indeed, when the doctrine of a creative power in God, as revealed in the Scriptures, is once rightly apprehended, every natural difficulty relating to the resurrection of the body must necessarily vanish. For is it more inconceivable, that God should collect the scattered particles of dust into that order and symmetry which may restore the human frame to its vital functions, than that he should originally have created and animated it from an absolute state of non-existence? Or cannot the same infinite artificer, who contrived and put together this frail and perishable machine, again restore it, correct its irregularities and imperfections, give it a strength and beauty and proportion, which, under his divine influence, shall never fall into decay or disorder; and by making it a spiritual body, adapt it to a glorified and immortal state? That this is the true Christian notion of a resurrection, St. Paul declares to the Corinthians in such divine strains, as by far surpass the most animated eloquence of Greece and Rome. *Behold!* says he, *I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall*

all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption; and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death! where is thy sting? O Grave! where is thy victory?

It is scarce possible to read this, and other passages of the like nature in Scripture, without reflecting upon the difference of the light in which the Christians and Heathens beheld the doctrine of an immortality; since the influence it had upon their sentiments, language, and behaviour, was so apparently different. Suffer me to produce a remarkable instance or two, to illustrate this observation.

Brutus, a man of rigid and stoical virtue, was by the principles of his sect an assertor of the doctrine of a future state. Finding the cause of himself and his friends unsuccessful, he gave it up, and made in his last moments this extraordinary declaration: "that he had worshipped virtue as the supreme good, but found it an idol and a name." Could any real and well-grounded persuasion of an immortality inspire the breast of that man, who could go out of the world with such an impatient and irreligious reflection? How different were the sentiments and language of St. Paul in the like circumstances of trial and affliction? *We are troubled,* says he, *on every side, but not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus Christ. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*

Compare the sentiments even of Socrates himself, with those of the same divine Apostle: "I have great hope," says that excellent Heathen to his judges, "that this sentence of condemnation may be to my advantage. For either in death all our sensations are extinguished, and then it is like the repose of a quiet and easy sleep without dreams; or else it is a

migration to another state, whither those are already gone that are departed out of this life. And if it be so, is it nothing, think ye, to talk with Orpheus, and Musæus, and Homer, and Hesiod? I could die many times for the delightful enjoyment of such conversation." But attend to the sublime conceptions of the Apostle of Christ, who speaks in a different manner of the society of the next world, and with a degree of confidence, as if we were already introduced to it: *Ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant.* What elevation of sentiment is here? How glorious an assembly does he present to our view! He speaks like an inhabitant of heaven.

The contrast will appear yet stronger in the words with which Socrates concludes his speech; in which, though we are told he does not give up his belief of a future state, yet we too plainly discover his avowed principle, that all human knowledge was at best but opinion. "But it is time for us," says he, "to depart; for me to die, for you to live. Which of the two is best, the immortal gods know, but I suppose no man upon earth can certainly tell." I would ask any wise and good man, whether he would choose to go out of the world with the sentiments of this Heathen, though perhaps the wisest and best that ever lived in it, or with those of St. Paul? *The time of my departure is at hand; I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also, that love his appearance.*

I could pursue this topic through a great variety of comparisons, all equally to the advantage of the Christian revelation; but it is time to draw to a conclusion of my discourse; the sum of which is this:—When man's original claim to eternal life had been forfeited, and God's intention of restoring him to it was universally either unknown or disregarded;

when the corruption of nature had sunk him down to the earth, and buried, as it were, his hopes and desires of a better state; when tradition was become an antiquated tale, and was so mixed with fable, as to make the doctrine it conveyed absurd and ridiculous; and when the wisdom of the world had reasoned many into an entire disbelief of it, and could not support others in an uniform, constant, and satisfactory persuasion of its truth:—then God, in his great goodness, was pleased to give light to them that sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, and sent his only-begotten son into the world, who revealed the whole counsel of God in the salvation of man, recovered him to right apprehensions of the dignity of his nature, fixed his thoughts upon the happiness of heaven, gave certainty to his hopes, and conviction to his reason, having, by the power of his resurrection, *abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

The practical application of this whole discourse, I shall briefly comprehend in the expressive words of St. Paul: *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above and not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God; that is, ye are now in a state of mortality, and the true principle of your future life is in the divine power of Christ, who will raise you from the dead; for when Christ, who is your life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.*

SERMON VI.

The Reality and Efficacy of the ordinary Operations of the Holy Spirit.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, at Christ Church, June 1st, 1766.]

JOHN, iii. 8.

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

IT has been observed, that there is something obscure, and seemingly abrupt, in the conversation which our blessed

blessed Lord held with Nicodemus, as related in this chapter. But if we can discover the intention of this eminent Pharisee in coming to our Lord, the obscurity will probably vanish, and the connection of this whole discourse, with the declaration that occasioned it, will be evident. We may reasonably suppose, that it was not a vain curiosity, but a serious desire of getting information in a matter of real importance, that induced Nicodemus to pay this secret and cautious visit. At the first interview, this ruler of the Jews, this member of the great sanhedrim or council, bears an honest testimony to the reality and greatness of our Saviour's miracles, as a thing indisputable: and he proceeds to draw the necessary conclusion arising from those miracles—that he must be a teacher come from God. You see, he acknowledges him to be a prophet; and the general expectation which prevailed at this time of the coming of that great one, together with the evidence of such mighty works, might naturally incline him to suspect, that Jesus was the person. But he came, doubtless, with the prejudices of his countrymen about him; and could not discover those marks of royalty, which they imagined would peculiarly distinguish their great deliverer, who was to restore the kingdom unto Israel. Our Saviour seems to understand him, as if he meant to put the same question to him, under this uncertainty of mind, as was asked by John's disciples—*Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?* He does not indeed satisfy him as to this point directly, but endeavours to enable him to give an answer to himself, by explaining to him the spiritual nature of that kingdom he was going to erect. And, at the same time, he expresses his surprise, that a master of Israel should want to be informed, that a more plentiful effusion of the divine spirit was to be a characteristic of the Messiah's reign. *Except a man be born again, he cannot see, he can neither discern nor be partaker of, the kingdom of God.* The Pharisee misunderstanding the expression of *being born again*, our Saviour thus explains it to him: *except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, except he be born again, or hath his nature renewed by that cleansing Spirit which washeth and purifieth from sin, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;*

that kingdom which is begun in this world by virtue, righteousness, and peace, and will be completed in the next, by perfect holiness and happiness. He goes on to this effect; Mistake me not; I speak not of a natural birth, but a spiritual one; *for that which is born of the flesh is flesh, frail and perishing, subject to dissolution and death; but that which is born of the Spirit is spirit, of heavenly extraction, the immediate creature of God, and heir of immortality.* I see you marvel at this, and want to be instructed in the manner of this new birth. It is very discernible in its effects, though the cause is not seen: that aerial spirit, called the wind, will illustrate to you the workings of the true divine spirit. *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.* Thou perceivest the gentle murmurs and breathings of the wind; thou feelest the refreshment of it; thou knowest its salutary influence, that it keeps the air sweet, and purges it from noxious and putrifying vapours: but in what manner its motion begins, what progress it takes, how, and when, and where, it arises and subsides, that thou knowest not, and canst not explain. The same kind of operation hath the Spirit of God. The inspiration of it flows like the soft and warm breezes of the air; it refreshes the soul with peaceful and pleasing thoughts; it keeps the conscience pure and undefiled, and preserves it from the pestilential contagion of sin. All this may be perceived and felt; but in what way the influences of the Spirit are derived to men; how the workings of it begin in the mind; or to what height and force they may arise; how far it may carry them with a prosperous gale, or where it may cease and expire; the author of it best knows, but thou canst not discover. But though we know not the manner and extent of the operation, we may with certainty find out the cause; we may know by the effects, what the cause is; for whether it be in the natural or spiritual world, the primary and never-ceasing cause of every good production is God.

In this text of Scripture, which I have commented upon, it was our Saviour's design to give an illustration of the ordinary agency and gifts of the Holy Ghost; for it represents the state of every one

that is born of the Spirit; of every regenerate person or true believer. When the extraordinary gifts of the same divine spirit were poured, on the Day of Pentecost, upon the Apostles, they were attended *with a rushing mighty wind, which filled the place where they sat.* In this case, the gifts themselves being of an uncommon nature, the manner of their communication was so too. But, in the ordinary dispensations of grace, there is no alarming demonstration of it from without, and every thing within is calm and quiet. And therefore the operation of it is compared to the gentle spirations of the air; for the original word, where there is no adjunct expressive of force, does not properly denote its violent and tempestuous commotions.

It will be the business, then, of this discourse, to treat of the ordinary operations and gifts of the holy spirit of God: and, in doing this, I shall,

First, Shew the reality and efficacy of them; and then I shall add some observations that may be of use in the consideration of this subject.

The inquiry, you will observe, is not how, or with what manner of agency, the spirit of God works upon our spirit, but whether it does really work upon it or not. The connection between causes and effects is often visible and certain, where we are totally ignorant of the operation of the one, or the production of the other. This is universally the case in all the appearances of nature. We know the natural principles that produce vegetation; but how they produce it, we cannot comprehend or explain. We know that light gives form and colour to the creation, and that sounds are conveyed by the vibrations of the air; but how they occasion these different sensations, reason and learning are at a loss to account for. We know, by the most certain experience of what passes within ourselves, that the mind acts upon the body, and the body upon the mind, and yet philosophy will not take upon itself to give us any conception, how either of these acts upon the other. And why may not spirit act upon spirit, as well as upon body? Nor can it be any objection to the reality of this action, that we are ignorant how it is performed. And surely the spirit of God may act upon the spirit of man, though the mode of his operation in the spiritual

as well as the material world may be very remote from our conception. In truth, it is altogether as unphilosophical as it is irreligious, to imagine that the universal Infinite Spirit, which created all things, which sustains all things, and which is as intimately present to every being as that being is to itself, cannot, or does not, influence, direct, impel, or control, according to the purposes of his own divine providence, every creature of his own, *which only lives and moves and has his being in him.*

None of the wiser Heathens have ever called in question the possibility of the agency of the divine spirit upon the human mind; and some of the virtuous ones have acknowledged its reality in the direction of their thoughts and inclinations. The patriarchs before the law, and the prophets under the law, had communications of it in an extraordinary manner; and they likewise professed their dependence upon it as their ordinary guide and support. But, under the dispensation of the gospel, the gifts and graces of it are shed abroad in a more diffusive manner; they are imparted to every sincere believer in Christ, nor can any man be a real Christian, who has not an intimate union with this heavenly companion. The declarations of the Scriptures upon this point are so frequent, determinate, and clear, as to leave no room for doubt or mistake. The true Christian, you will there find, from the beginning to the end of his conversation, is led by the hand of God; is assisted, guided, and forwarded, in all his thoughts and actions, by his holy spirit; he advances by the power of grace to the kingdom of glory, and can make no progress in his journey, any farther than he is conducted, animated, and supported by this divine comforter and assistant.

Let us proceed to consider more particularly the efficacy of this spirit of grace. And we shall find, that its operations are directed to such purposes as are most necessary for our condition, and most conducive to our happiness. The state of the natural unregenerate man is represented in Scripture to be a state of enmity with God. And the causes assigned for his being alienated from God, are, the ignorance that is in him, and wicked works. His understanding being darkened and perverted, he does not sufficiently apprehend and consider the law

that is to direct his conduct, nor attend to the obligations of it: and his passions and appetites being unsubdued, he is led captive by them, and made a slave to sin, even against the knowledge which he has, and under the condemnation of his own mind. In this unhappy state, the spirit of God is graciously pleased to interpose, and converts him, as it were, into a new creature, by enlightening his understanding, and reducing his affections into due subjection and order. I shall enlarge upon each of these points.

It is evident from fact, that human reason, under its best cultivation and improvement, was never able to arrive at a complete knowledge of the perfect law of God. This knowledge has, however, been graciously communicated to the world, by the extraordinary manifestation of the divine spirit; which inspired the teachers of Christianity with wisdom and understanding, to declare the whole counsel of God in the redemption of mankind; and which bore a divine testimony to the truth of their doctrines by many wonderful works. But this revelation never had, nor ever can have, any salutary effect, but upon minds prepared to receive it. And the operation of the same divine spirit is still necessary to enlarge and qualify our understanding for the discernment of spiritual truths, and of the excellency of the gospel of Christ: it is necessary to dispel those clouds of ignorance and prejudice that intercept the view of heavenly objects, and to correct that pride and self-sufficiency, which, by making us wise in our own conceits, more effectually fortifies us in error. At the publication of the gospel, not many wise men, not many learned, were called to the profession of it. Their wisdom and learning were a bar to their conversion, which could not take place, so long as it depended upon reasoning from their own principles. For the cross of Christ was a *stumbling-block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Greeks*; and nothing but the special grace of God, imparted by his spirit, could extinguish those false lights which misled them in their search after truth, and open their understanding to the perception of the power and wisdom of God. The same pride of an unenlightened understanding, refusing and setting at nought the assistance and direction of this divine counsellor, will always

disqualify it from making any progress in religious knowledge, and will render the best natural intellectual abilities not only useless to the possessors of them, but, in the highest degree, mischievous to themselves and to mankind. Of this a late dogmatical writer will furnish us with a striking example. The natural powers of his understanding seem to have been of superior growth and strength; these were enlarged by an extensive knowledge of philosophy, history, and mankind; and this knowledge has been communicated to the world with great force of language and confidence of assertion. And where have these great abilities carried him? Even into the very dregs and sink of atheism.—“To ascribe to God the moral attributes of holiness, justice, and goodness, is, with him, enthusiasm and blasphemy; that God exercises any special providence over his creatures, or has any regard to the events that befall individuals, is folly to believe; that man should survive his dissolution by death, and that there is, on the other side of the grave, a future state of retribution, is an idle tale, which has no real foundation in nature or reason.” Had the least ray of the divine spirit enlightened the understanding of this daring writer, could he possibly have prostituted it to the contrivance and support of a wretched system of such abominable and exploded absurdities as these? In instances of this nature, we see that the pride of reason, which disdains to submit to be directed by the light of Heaven and the admonitions of grace, prevents its apprehension of the most clear and evident truths, even of natural religion; much less will it suffer itself to embrace those divine truths which are made known by revelation only. Great reason, therefore, had St. Paul to pray, as he often prays in behalf of his converts, *that God would enlighten their minds and understanding; that he would increase their knowledge; that he would give them a right judgment in all things.* And here I shall just stop to observe, that the Apostle is so far from denying men the use of their reason in religious matters, that he prays for the improvement of its faculties for their greater proficiency in them; knowing, that they will see farther and better into the things pertaining to their salvation, if it shall please God to give them a sober understanding,

to increase their portion of it, to assist them in the exercise and application of it, and dispose them to delight in the attainment of religious knowledge. And I must further observe, that Christianity is so far from declining an appeal to reason, in the examination of its proofs and doctrines, that it requires the most perfect and unbiassed exercise of it, to know its nature and value: and where the mind is most enlightened, the compass of real knowledge most extensive, and the judgment most discerning, there it will always be best understood, and most willingly embraced.

But I proceed to consider the operations of the spirit, as they are concerned in the regulation of the passions and appetites. Now the spirit of God influences the mind of man, not only by giving light to the understanding, by restraining it within the proper limits of its powers, by directing its application to the pursuit of religious knowledge, and by giving it that steadiness and complacency which arises from a well-grounded conviction of the truth, importance, and excellence of the gospel of Christ; but it likewise gives vigour to its authority, by reducing the inferior faculties, which are so apt to disturb its operations, into due subordination and obedience; it bends the will and subdues the affections to submit to its commands. This St. Paul, in his description of the unregenerate Jew or Heathen, in the seventh chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, represents to be a thing impossible to be done by the mere powers of nature; and even a Christian must have been trained up and practised in the discipline of the gospel, and, through the constant supplies and increase of grace, must have made great progress in his profession, before he can put his reason in quiet possession of its dominion, and reduce his irregular passions to pay a ready obedience to it without pain or reluctance. In the case both of the unregenerate Heathen and undisciplined Christian, the law of righteousness arising from the will of God is supposed; and that the understanding is capable of discovering the excellency and obligation of it, though in different degrees. But the misfortune is, that the actions of men are not always regulated by the conviction of the understanding. The passions and sensual appetites overbear its authority, and despise

its commands; and man pays an obedience to the law of sin, at the very time that he disapproves and condemns it in his own conscience. He owns the authority of his true and natural Lord, and yet pays obedience to an usurper and a tyrant. He knows the commands of the one to be reasonable, and subjection to his rule and government to be honourable; this subjection he refuses to pay, and at the same time submits to the arbitrary and debasing sway of the most cruel master. He approves the law which he violates, and obeys the law which he condemns. Captivated and enthralled by his lusts, he rebels against his own reason and understanding, and all the while that he is the slave of sin, he is the approver and admirer of virtue. There cannot be a state of more complete and miserable servitude than this. And what can deliver us from this wretched captivity? Nothing can do this but the mercy of God, vouchsafed to us through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, and the effectual assistance of his holy spirit, which alone can give us the victory in this unequal contest. Accordingly, by the mighty power of the spirit of life, the complete and real Christian is represented to be made free from the law of sin and death. There is no longer any conflict between the law of his mind, and the law in his members. Passion and appetite are contented to pay due homage and obedience to the superior faculty of the understanding; they aim not to force or to seduce it to rebel against duty. All the powers within him act in their proper sphere and regular order. He knows the will of God, and it is his comfort and delight to obey it. He walks uniformly on in the ways of virtue and peace, without disturbance or weariness, and safely arrives at his journey's end, with the near prospect of immortality before him.

Now, if the unregenerate Heathen, when destitute of the divine grace, and the imperfect Christian, who undervalues and rejects its aid, cannot pay a due obedience to the law of righteousness, though they own its authority, and approve its excellence; and if the same persons, when converted to a truly Christian life, are enabled, by that assistance, only to pay such a regular obedience to the law of God, as will be accepted by him, and will be rewarded with eternal happiness; then

then it is plain, that to order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men, which are our great seducers, and carry us astray from our duty, is strictly and properly the work of the spirit of God; and that all our proficiency in goodness is as much owing to his grace, as the reward of our obedience is to his mercy.

The Scriptures have not only given us a general assurance of the operation and influence of this divine spirit, both upon the understanding and affections, but they have moreover specified various particulars, wherein he has engaged and promised his assistance, if we are willing to receive this heavenly guest into our hearts, to listen to his silent admonitions, and to be directed by his wholesome counsels. He will further us in all our religious undertakings; will settle us in the true knowledge and faith of Christ; will lift up our thoughts and desires to Heaven; will help our devotion, and give wings to our prayers. He will direct us in our doubts; comfort us in our afflictions; support us in our troubles; fortify us against temptations; give us strength and courage in trials and persecutions; and will arm us against the fear of death. Where he finds a ready disposition to receive him, and an honest and upright heart, he will come, and will make his abode with us, and will be our companion, our guard, our comforter. We shall feel and confess the enlivening presence of this holy spirit in the peace of conscience, in an unruffled composure and serenity of mind, in having a delight in virtue, in the possession of all those Christian graces that purify and refine the soul, in the assurance of God's favour, and in hopes full of immortality. These are the blessed effects which the Scriptures, in various passages, attribute to the holy spirit of God; and these effects the pious and good Christian, who is led by the spirit, does, according to the measure and proportion of it, most undoubtedly feel. And although he may not be at all times equally sensible of his presence and consolation, yet, so long as he continues in the fear and love of God, and the regular practice of his duty, he may be assured, that this divine guide has his residence still with him, and that he will not leave him nor forsake him.

It now remains, that I make an observation or two, that may be of use to

us in the consideration of this subject.

And first, I observe, that the operations of the divine grace are consistent with the free exercise of our own natural faculties. God having given us understanding and freedom of will, deals with us, in the communication of his spirit, as rational and free agents; and whatever additional strength he may give us in the use of our faculties, he does not supersede the faculties themselves, nor take away the use of them. Because *God worketh in us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure*, is no reason why we should sit still in a state of indolence and quietism, and do nothing for ourselves; but it is the very reason given by the Apostle, why we should endeavour *to work out our own salvation*. If our minds are enlightened, our knowledge increased, and our judgment corrected by the spirit of God, he designs, no doubt, that we should make a proper use of these advantages, and bend the whole force of our understanding thus improved, to make the divine law our meditation and study, and to advance in that knowledge, which will make us wise unto salvation. If he puts the reins of our passions and appetites into our hands, it is with an intention that we should make use of them: and if he gives us an inward conviction, that all his laws are holy, and just, and good; if he makes our obedience to them practicable and easy, and annexes to the regular performance of our duty that delight and joy, which the good Christian only can feel, and the spirit of consolation inspire; then, doubtless, he gives us this assistance and encouragement, not to make us careless and remiss in running the race that is set before us, but to call forth all our powers, under the animating confidence, that the strength which we want, the spirit of grace will supply. And there cannot be a stronger motive to induce us to summon the little strength that we have, and to set forward, with all our might, in the way that leadeth unto life, than the assurance that we can depend upon greater strength than our own, which will invigorate our weakness, and carry us successfully to our journey's end.

I observe, secondly, that the production of the fruits of the spirit is the only sure evidence we can have or give, of our being under the power and direction of

of it. It appears, that in the communication of the ordinary gifts of the spirit, which every true Christian partakes of, there is no outward sensible operation: there is neither a rushing mighty wind to be heard, nor cloven tongues of fire to be seen. It acts silently and invisibly, and is only felt in the comfort and refreshment it gives to the soul, and discovers itself by the effects which it produces. What those are, the Scriptures have told us, namely, love, joy, peace, in all goodness, righteousness, and truth; with gentleness, faith, meekness, temperance—all the enlivening, mild, and pleasing virtues that belong to the Christian life. And to these they every where refer us, for the evidence of the spirit, and not to feelings, which are occasioned by the passionate emotions of an overheated imagination or enthusiastic phrenzy. They give us no intimations of any other feelings, but what arise from a delight in God's commandments, from peace of conscience, from a present sense of God's favour and support, and from well-grounded hopes of everlasting happiness hereafter. These are the feelings of a reasonable nature, which do not tempestuously agitate the mind, but give it a serene composure; which do not overwhelm its faculties, but assist them; which do not play upon the imagination and transport it with fanatical ecstasies, but fill the heart with a rational comfort and sober joy. Is any one then desirous to know, whether he is truly under the guidance and power of the divine spirit, let him examine his own state, and inquire, whether he finds in himself a sincere desire of doing the will of God, and an ability to put in practice the duties of his profession; and whether his mind be at peace with God and with itself;—and the answer will determine the point. If he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ with all his heart, and relies solely upon his merits for the remission of his sins, and his acceptance with God; if he sincerely desires to do God's will, and takes a delight in doing it; if he is punctual and regular in the discharge of the duties of his religion; if he keeps himself free from presumptuous and habitual sins, and guards himself, as much as possible, from those of infirmity and surprise, and is grieved and penitent on the commission of them; if upon an impartial review of his

present state, his conscience condemns him not, he feels no guilty upbraidings and remorse, but is full of consolation and holy hope—we may then venture to pronounce, upon the surest evidence, that he is guided by the spirit of God, and is in a state of grace.

The third, and last observation I shall make is this:—That great care is necessary on our parts, to secure the continuance of the divine assistance of the spirit of grace, as it is possible that we may be deserted by it, and fall in the end from the life and hopes of a Christian. The holy Scriptures, in the various representations they give of a Christian state, always suppose that this may be the case. When the Christian is resembled to one that runs in a race, that he may obtain the prize, he is exhorted to a resolute perseverance in his course, and is cautioned not to stop or faint by the way. St. Paul tells us, that even he himself constantly used the same degree of discipline, and laboured to invigorate himself by spiritual exercises, with the same care and anxiety, as they shewed who endeavoured to prepare themselves for the Olympic races, lest he might after all be a cast-away, and fall short of the prize. When the state of a Christian is likened to that of an heir, who is born to the inheritance of a great possession, it is still supposed, that he may defeat his own claim. For an heir is not in actual possession, nor will he be put into it, if he ever cancels his title by such acts of disobedience as the law declares to be a forfeiture of it. Nay, where the Holy Spirit is represented to have set his seal to the conveyance, it is not even then irrevocable: for St. Paul, when writing to the Ephesians, he tells them, *they were sealed by the spirit of God to the day of redemption*, in the very same passage supposes, that the seal might be torn off, and their inheritance forfeited. Otherwise, he would not have cautioned them against *grieving the Holy Spirit of God*, if it had now been no longer in their power to offend or provoke him; nor could the spirit be grieved by those, who could not commit sin, which is the only thing that could give them certain assurance of their final salvation. In truth, the condition of human life is inconsistent with such assurance: for it is, in every stage of it, as it is represented by the Scriptures to be,
a state

a state of trial and probation; it is impossible it can be a state of absolute security. And indeed the presumption of such security would be the most likely thing in the world to defeat itself. A persuasion, that we had already won the prize, before our race was finished, would naturally cause in us that remissness, which would be the very occasion of our losing it. It will better become our condition, and contribute more to our safety, to believe, that so long as we are in a state of mortality we are in a state of danger—beset with many powerful enemies, who, if they cannot seduce us by other temptations, will endeavour to puff us up with spiritual pride; and, by giving us false conceptions of the gifts we may possess, will make them the very instruments of our destruction. Happy are we, if we have sufficient assurance of God's protection and favour in our present state, to make our minds easy and contented. This we may have, as long as we delight in his commandments and pay a regular obedience to his laws: but such assurance as may be likely to carry us into carelessness and disobedience, would be inconsistent with God's wisdom to give, and our own prudence to desire. And therefore whatever measure of his grace it may please God to impart to any one, it will always be his interest and duty, were he the most perfect man upon earth, to pray for the continuance and increase of it; knowing, that he can have no security for his perseverance, but from the divine assistance and support, and that he, and he only, *who perseveres unto the end will be saved.*

S E R M O N VII.

Moral Perception of Good and Evil,
not a sufficient Rule for Human
Actions without Religion.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, at
Christ Church, June 21st, 1767.]

PROV. xvi. 6.

By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.

IT is evident to every man, from his being endued with sense and understanding, that there is an essential difference in the things of this world, both in

its natural and moral constitution; since these faculties give him the perception of this difference, even whether he will or not. He *feels*, that there is a power in external objects, of producing in him agreeable or disagreeable sensations: and he cannot but *think* some actions to be reasonable and right, and others to be unreasonable and wrong. The information he receives from his understanding in one case, is as much to be depended upon as that which he receives from his senses in the other; and the distinction between moral good and evil is as real and certain as it is between natural good and evil. To distinguish rightly in each case, it must be supposed, that the faculties are in right order, and capable of performing their proper operations: and certainly the more perfect the faculties are, the more accurate the discernment will be. There is found indeed to be in general a greater difference in the perfection of men's understanding, than in that of their senses; chiefly, because *that* of the former depends more upon cultivation. And, consequently, the more minute distinctions in moral action will be more clearly discovered by one man than another. But the great outlines of morality are strongly traced out in the human mind; and the delineation therein made of virtue and vice presents such different pictures of them, that they cannot but appear to every man in very different forms of comeliness and deformity. For this reason, the Scriptures suppose, that to confound the notion of virtue and vice, shews as great a depravity in the understanding, as it does in the senses to confound contrary perceptions; and that to *put evil for good and good for evil*, is the same thing as to *put darkness for light and light for darkness*, to *put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter*.

Since then the human mind is so framed, as not only to perceive the distinction between moral good and evil, but likewise to view the one with approbation and delight, and the other with disgust and abhorrence; it might seem reasonable to think, that this moral perception, by directing and inclining every man to pursue that which is good, and avoid that which is evil, with the assistance of reason, which enables him to distinguish the greater from the less, the real from the apparent, might be a sufficient

ficient guide and security to his conduct. And indeed it might be so, could we suppose his perception to be comprehensive and distinct, and his reason clear and unembarrassed, always having in view the remote consequences of things, and giving a right bias to his passions and affections. But as the case is far otherwise, some other aids must be called in for the security of his virtue, beside a moral sense of the rectitude of action. For if his perception is not clear enough to discern in all cases the exact line of moral conduct, he will stand in need of farther light; if his reason is defective, and frequently obstructed in its operations, he will want the defect to be supplied, and the obstacles removed; if it cannot always give his passions and affections a right direction, he must look out for the assistance of some other principle that will counteract those motives which give them a wrong one: and, after all, were his rational faculties ever so perfect, and did all the inferior ones move in their proper sphere with the most exact and uniform regularity; yet, as he is the creature of God, dependent upon his power, and subject to his will, he must consider the rule of right conduct to be the law of God; and a principle of obedience to the divine will must be the great master-spring of moral action, that should influence, regulate, and control, all the motions of the human mind. It is, in truth, the universal principle of nature, which governs the whole creation; and men and angels are subject to its power.

The religious principle of obedience is, in the language of the Old Testament, usually styled, *the fear of God*, and *the fear of the Lord*; because upon this fear alone, obedience to the law of God, or the conformity of human actions to the perfect rule of human conduct, is supposed to depend. *By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil*: by which is meant, that it is not only the best security against moral evil, or vice, but is likewise the strongest incitement to the practice of virtue. Now the book of the Old Testament is allowed to contain the oldest writings that are in the world: it is therefore a presumptive evidence, both of the authenticity and reasonableness of this principle, that it there discovers to us the first notion upon record, comprehensive of the whole duty of man and its obliga-

tion. It was undoubtedly the principle of action to our first parents in paradise; and, had they stedfastly adhered to it, would have prevented their fall. It made the patriarchs faithful in their religion, and exemplary in their lives: and in the law of Moses, it was proposed to the Jews, as the only sure principle upon which their virtue and happiness must depend. How it came to pass, that so little notice should be taken of it by many eminent Heathens, who built their moral systems upon other much weaker foundations, is not easily to be accounted for, unless we suppose, they had no just notions or firm belief of God and his providence, and a future state, and did not think that religion had evidence or force enough to be of service to a moral philosopher, and so left it to the civil magistrate as a mere political engine of government. But what shall we say, if in these later times, when the disquisitions of reason, directed and ascertained by the light of revelation, have clearly discovered the strength and worth of every moral principle, there should be found those who have not barely overlooked, but have exploded, the notion of the fear of God; not allowing it to be the proper foundation of morality; and what is still more wonderful, no not of religion itself? There must, it seems, be an independency and disinterestedness in virtue, without which it loses its nature; and God cannot be the object of fear: for it is malice, say they, and not goodness, that makes us afraid.

In opposition to the sophistry of these immoral and irreligious imaginations,

I shall, First, State the true notion of the fear of God: and,

Secondly, I shall consider it as a principle of moral action.

And from the due consideration of these particulars it will appear, both that the fear of the Lord is true piety, and that piety is the only solid foundation and never-failing support of morality.

I. First then I am to state the true notion of the fear of God.

Now this notion must arise from, and be regulated by, the apprehensions we have of the nature of God and his attributes; and, consequently, the truer the conceptions are which we form to ourselves of the divine nature, the more rational will our fear be. The Epicurean notion of God manifestly discards all fear

of him in every kind and degree: for to represent the all-seeing Governor of the universe as a supine and indolent being, involved in his own happy tranquillity, who will give no attention to the events that happen to mankind, and have no concern in their happiness or misery, is to destroy every relation we can stand in to him; and where there is no intercourse, dependance, or union, there is no room for fear, or for any other passion and affection. Superstition, on the contrary, produces a servile and dismaying fear: it trembles at the apprehensions of a Deity; mistakes the God of justice for the God of vengeance; and can view him in no other attitude but with the uplifted thunder-bolt in his hand. This fear of him is the dread of an arbitrary tyrant, who delights in cruelty, and scatters terrors amongst his subjects without reason or distinction: and were there any just foundation for it, it must be owned, that in this case it would be malice and not goodness; no, nor even justice, that made us afraid. But when we contemplate the Deity in that true light wherein reason and revelation conspire to place him, and are afraid of him, how widely different is our religious fear from this? It will not then arise from the apprehensions we may have of any single tremendous attribute of the divine nature, without any consideration of the rest; but will result from the idea of a complete combination and union of all possible perfections in one simple and undivided essence; wherein a wonderful harmony of infinite knowledge, wisdom, power, justice, holiness, goodness, and truth, is for ever preserved, and gives us an infallible assurance, that the Judge of all the earth will do right in all his proceedings with the children of men.

But even this right apprehension of the Deity will produce a different fear in different persons. The sinner, who is conscious to himself of having incurred God's displeasure, must think, if he will think as he ought to do, that divine goodness and mercy cannot be exercised in his favour in such a manner as is inconsistent with divine justice and holiness; for this would be to discompose the perfect harmony of the divine attributes, by setting them at variance with one another. He knows that punishment is due to transgression; and, if he persists in his offences,

he will have reason, upon every suggestion of conscience, to be alarmed at the danger he has thereby been warned to shun. For how can he think, that God will not, after all, assert the holiness, and vindicate the authority, and punish the violation, of his laws? Or how can he persuade himself, that mercy should so far prevail against judgment, as to confound right and wrong, and overthrow the first principles of equity, by supposing, that there will be one event to the righteous and to the wicked, to him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not.

The fear of God then, as of a righteous judge, who is the hater and punisher of iniquity, is a very just and rational fear in a sinner, who is conscious to himself of having incurred the displeasure of the Almighty. And well might he tremble at the sentence of infinite justice, were it not tempered and allayed by no less infinite goodness and mercy. How to reconcile these, fell not within the reach of man's conception; but God hath revealed it to him in the mystery of his redemption; wherein justice and mercy are met together, and have kindly embraced each other: the one strictly requiring, the other graciously accepting, an atonement for transgressions by the blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, the propitiation for the sins of the whole world.

This wonderful and gracious dispensation of mercy to sinful men, conscious of their offences against God, and ignorant of the means of reconciliation, has placed him in a new relation to us, and a milder light. The torment of fear remains only for unrepenting guilt. Fear, in its strict sense, which is the mere dread of impending evil, (as St. John informs us in the epistle of the day,) is no longer the passion of a Christian: the more emboldening passions of hope, assurance, complacency, joy, and love, enter into the composition of his fear, and turn it into reverence and honour. The fear that possesses a good Christian is a filial fear; the fear that is impressed upon the mind of a well-nurtured child, from the authority of a discreet and tender parent—so wisely and affectionately exercised, that love is produced even by discipline, and reverence by indulgence. He knows the government he is under to be righteous,

ous, mild, and good ; and that his happiness depends upon his submission to it. He looks upon his governor to be his best friend and benefactor ; and he therefore fears to transgress, because he is afraid to offend.

From the nature of this religious fear, which, in the heart of a good Christian, is always mixed and tempered with love, gratitude, and affiance, the principle of obedience is more frequently proposed to us in the New Testament, under the notion of *the love of God*, than of *the fear of him* ; though, in effect, they are one and the self-same compound principle. For if the mystery of man's redemption reveals to us the tender mercies of God, displayed in a wonderful manner, beyond all our conceptions and hopes, it must, at the same time, raise in us the most awful ideas of his justice and purity and infinite abhorrence of sin ; the malignity of which may be justly estimated from the invaluable price of that sacrifice which was the expiation of it ; and the greatness of God's displeasure against it, from the measure of the love which he bore to his only-begotten son.

These considerations of mercy and severity, which ought never to be disunited, will always preserve in the mind of a true Christian, right apprehensions of the divine nature. They will represent God as graciously reconciled to returning sinners, but who cannot be reconciled to sin. They will represent him in the endearing relations of his creator, preserver, redeemer, friend, and father ; but they will represent him likewise under the awful character of his governor and judge ; who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity ; who searches the heart of man, and scrutinizes his thoughts and actions ; who mercifully accepts his willing though imperfect services, but will sorely punish the rebellious and irreclaimable offender. These sentiments will produce in him a reverential love ; confidence without presumption ; and fear without dismay. The consideration of the greatness of the power and majesty of God will not terrify and confound him : the apprehensions of his infinite justice, in conjunction with his infinite wisdom and goodness, will not overwhelm him with a desponding dread, but will quicken and enliven his obedience : nor, on the contrary, will any fond persuasions of un-

conditional, indiscriminate mercy to sinners incline him to think, that he will remit the punishment of unrepented of, unatoned for, sin. In short, the contemplation of the divine nature will furnish him with every inducement that the greatest and best of beings can lay upon him, to love and honour, to fear, adore, and obey him.

And now, what is there in this tribute of religious fear that is unworthy of God to require, or of man to pay ? Shall not he exact that reverence and honour which is due to him as our creator, preserver, redeemer, governor, and judge ? And shall not we fall low on our knees before his foot-stool, acknowledge our dependence, adore his majesty and condescension, and stand in awe of him that ought to be feared ? Surely, it is not tyranny in our Lord and Master to command this our reasonable service ; nor is it servility in man, but it is his privilege and his honour, thus to fear him.

II. Having thus explained the nature of the fear of God, I now proceed, in the second place, to consider it as a principle of moral action.

Now, because this principle, explained in such a manner as to be consistent with right apprehensions of the divine nature and attributes, does of necessity admit the truth of that divine revelation, which has made known to us the mystery of man's redemption ; therefore some vain and sceptical men, out of hatred to revealed religion, which they openly renounce, and in despite even of natural religion, which they would be thought to retain, have taken upon them to remove this chief corner-stone of the foundation of morality. They pretend, that morality is independent upon religion ; that the idea of virtue is distinct from all considerations of duty ; and that virtue has in itself sufficient authority to bind mankind, as a law, without the additional enforcement of the fear of God.

It is not my design to enter into any nice and metaphysical disquisitions concerning the origin and nature of moral virtue. Let it be deduced from the abstracted relation and fitness of things ; or from the eternal and immutable difference of right and wrong : and define it after what manner you please : let it be right and self-consistent reason : let it be the love of order, or a just proportion and

and harmony of mind : let it be a system of action consonant to the perfection of nature, or directed to the good of the whole human species, of which we are a part : view it in whatever light speculation can place it ; yet still it will be the law of God ; and the sanction of this law must be the fear of him.

For, if virtue and vice arise from what is suitable or unsuitable to the constitution of nature, let it be remembered, that all nature is the creature of God ; and that he established that very order and relation of things from which they are supposed to derive their essence.—Is the distinction betwixt right and wrong eternal and immutable ? so is the nature of God ; and his government cannot be different from what it is. Are we therefore to reject his government, because he makes that distinction to be the rule of it, which we suppose to be as fixt and unalterable as it is reasonable and right ?—Is the practice of virtue the same thing with the exercise of right reason ? then certainly it is the will of God that we should be virtuous ; and we have the happiness to serve a master whor equires from us a reasonable service, and cannot require any other.—Does virtue flow from an exact proportion and harmony of the faculties of the mind ? it must then be the design of the God of order that this harmony should be preserved ; and we transgress his law as well as the law of nature, if we suffer the inferior faculties to usurp the authority of the superior one.—Is the virtue of every individual made to consist in acting for the general good of the whole human species ? and have we no obligations, are we not to lift up a single thought, to the great creator and governor of the whole race of mankind ; who suited our nature to our situation ; who formed and fitted us for the advantages of society ; and who implanted in us those benevolent affections upon which the happiness of it is supposed to depend ?—In short, no principles but those of atheism can set us clear of our religious obligations ; and we must of necessity discard the fear of God and the belief of him at the same time.

Let us consider then more distinctly the excellency of this religious principle, and the great advantages which morality will receive from it.

1. And, first, I observe, that it enlarges and completes the system of moral virtue.

Now, this system can never be complete and perfect, unless it respects and takes in not only all the different relations betwixt man and man, but those likewise which we bear to all other beings, and especially rational beings, which are known to us, and we have any connection with. Such actions, therefore, as are suitable to, and becoming the relation we stand in to God, must make an essential part of morality. They have accordingly been very justly introduced into the system of it by one of the best Heathen moralists as a branch of natural justice. For if there is a being of infinite perfection, who is the supreme lord and governor of the world, what can be more just and equitable, than that we should exercise all acts of piety and religion ; of faith, trust, and assiance ; of love, reverence, and obedience towards him ? To strike these out of the catalogue of virtues, is not only a violation of duty, but it is a mutilation of virtue itself : and they who detach morality from religion, give us only a part for the whole, and deform the entire system of it by leaving out the most essential virtues, that have an inseparable union with, and give stability to, all the rest. For it must be farther observed, that the religious principle diffuses itself through social life, and both strengthens and enlarges those obligations which bind men to one another in truth and justice, and are the security of good order and peace. This is acknowledged even by the enemies of religion themselves, who, when they suppose all religion to be the contrivance of statesmen and politicians, do plainly confess that it is necessary to keep the world in any tolerable order, and that the bands of society would be relaxed without it. But religion does not only thus cement and hold together all the parts of social morality, but it enlarges the circle of it by creating new relations betwixt man and man. Discard all considerations of God's relation to us, and the obligations consequent upon it, and there will scarce be left any other ties but those of self-interest to bind mankind together ; and our independent virtues will be little better than mercenary ones. But look upon God as the common father of the whole human race, who has made us all to spring from the same original stock, and we are evidently placed in the relation of brethren to one another.

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Confanguinity begets mutual love and affection; and hence a natural principle is formed in man, productive of the most extensive offices of benevolence and humanity.

Proceed in this contemplation one step further: Consider the relation we bear to God, not only from the work of our creation, but from that of our redemption likewise; and we are then the sons of God by adoption, and become brethren to each other by a new and still nearer relation. Such as is the union betwixt those members which derive vital spirits from the same head, and being knit closely together, constitute the same body; such is the conjunction of Christians, who are one body, enlivened by one spirit, are called in one hope of their calling, are subject to one Lord, profess one faith, worship one God, who being the common father of all, unites them as brethren to one another; and being above all, and through all, and in them all, doth, by an indissoluble bond, unite them to himself in Christ, which is the head. Here is a new principle implanted in us of unity and affection; and hence arises a lovely train of the most gracious and beneficent virtues—humility, resignation, mildness, meekness, gentleness, forbearance, and forgiveness—virtues, which soften human nature, and transform the man into a new creature. Moral benevolence is now refined and exalted into Christian charity; which, taking its rise from the infinite love of God, embraces the whole fraternity of Christians, and has the strength and force of an eternal union, which neither death nor time can dissolve. Thus we see how the religious principle new-models, enlarges, and completes the system of moral virtues.

2. I observe, secondly, that it regulates and invigorates every other subordinate principle that can be of service to the cause of virtue.

Those that wish well to it, and know that it has always many powerful enemies to encounter, would be very unwilling to deprive it of any alliances or aids that may be useful to support it in the quiet and peaceable possession of its authority. The constitution of nature, and of society, supply us with many of these aids; and the Scriptures readily admit them as auxiliaries to the religious principle. But this must always have the supreme

command; otherwise, the separate or combined forces of its allies will be unregulated, undisciplined, and weak. Let some of the chief of them pass before us in review; and let reason appear in the van.

And an excellent principle it is. In God is the origin and perfection of it; and from the bright beams of his own essential light he has imparted a ray of it to all moral creatures, to shew them the way wherein they should go, and to guide their footsteps in it. If therefore we do not exercise it in all the acts of religious homage that are due to him who gave it, we are unreasonable and ungrateful: and if we put more confidence in it than it deserves, we are foolish and presumptuous. The reason we have, can be no other than human reason; and how insufficient this has ever been in its mere natural state, clearly to discover many important truths, which give birth to a great part of morality, and establish the rest, let the sages of antiquity, let the wisdom of the world, declare and testify. But this is not all. We are not altogether intelligent creatures, but sensitive ones likewise, having appetites and passions which strongly excite and stimulate us to action. These having no prudence of their own, must be directed and guided by our reason. But is reason in all instances either an able or a faithful guide? Has mere speculative reason always the power to control the violent and inordinate impulses of passion; or to restrain the ardour of eager and fantastical appetites? Does it not, on the contrary, oftentimes prostitute itself to inflame them both? And how ingenious is it, in finding food for their most irregular gratifications, and excuses to justify them in their greatest enormities? Reason itself therefore wants a tutor and a guide; and we cannot safely trust to it, unless it is directed by the law of God, and regulated by the fear of him; and then it will not go astray, nor lead us astray.

Another principle is seated in the good affections of the mind, which some have supposed to be the basis of virtue, upon which it may stand firm and secure. But here we evidently pay too great a compliment to human nature. For as, in the one extreme, it is highly injurious to represent mankind as so many beasts of prey, made only by nature to tear and devour

devour one another (a calumny, which every one that has the least tincture of humanity must feel); so we manifestly run into the contrary extreme, when we make ourselves to be all kind instinct, and good affection, and love of virtue for virtue's sake. The truth is, the seeds of benevolent propensions and kind dispositions towards every thing that is truly good and amiable were originally sown in the heart of man; but they may not spring up and grow to maturity for want of due cultivation; and our good affections may be stifled by counter-inclinations, which, like rank and poisonous weeds, have been suffered to grow up along with them. Cultivation then is necessary to manage and improve the soil, and to cherish the tender plant. And what shall induce men to undergo the labour and toil that this cultivation requires; frequently, against their natural temper, and the bent of their inclinations? What shall give the good affections an ascendancy over the bad ones, when it often happens, that the latter are constitutionally, or by habit, the most active and the strongest? The fear of God will do this; but nothing else can do it. By the power of this principle, every man will be master of his own faculties; every turbulent emotion of hatred, envy, malice, pride, revenge, and lust will subside; the benevolent affections will gain strength, and prevail; he will be able to maintain the purity and dignity of his nature, he knows that he is designed to rank with angels, and therefore he will not degrade himself into the brute.

From these observations we may easily collect, that it is the same principle which must open and improve the moral sense to the discernment of the beauty of virtue, so much celebrated by some of the ancient philosophers, and which they suppose to have the power of captivating all beholders. For it is certain, that this sense cannot be found, but where a refinement of the mind, gentleness and purity of affection, an intimate acquaintance with virtue, and the contemplation of its divine extraction, have duly prepared the soul to receive it. And for these we must be indebted to a principle of religion, acting with its full force upon us through the grace of God. We shall then be capable of perceiving the loveliness of virtue in its native features, and under its greatest improvement; we shall see it rising in beauty, as we trace it nearer to its source;

we shall behold it, as in a glass, reflected from the bright effulgence of the Divine Essence—a beam of his own eternal light, issuing from the throne of God.

I shall mention but one more motive, which has been sometimes thought sufficient to recommend virtue to the esteem and practice of mankind, and that is, the power of it to secure our own temporal welfare in the general happiness of society. True it is, that through the gracious dispensation of Providence, the happiness of mankind in this world does, in a great measure, depend upon the exercise of virtue. And it is no less true, that in many instances virtue is no safeguard at all to our happiness. It cannot protect us from innumerable evils which are incident to humanity and belong to our very being. It has sometimes peculiar sufferings of its own, from the malignity of unreasonable and wicked men; and when deprived of the comfort of religious influence, it loses one of its most valuable properties, the power of supporting us under affliction. This is evidently the case in the present mixed state of things: but were men once generally set loose from the fear of God; did not their consciences admonish them, that there is a rewarder and avenger of their actions; the case of virtue would be far more wretched and deplorable. It would be continually exposed to insults and oppression from without, and could find no refuge within. So, that as it is owing to the God of nature that we are formed for society, and have instincts and powers given us to promote the good order of it for the common happiness, so it is principally owing to the fear of God, that this order is in any wise preserved.

Having thus far considered the effects of this religious principle, in giving perfection to the system of morality, and in regulating and increasing the power of every subordinate principle that can contribute to its support, I shall briefly take notice, in the third and last place, of some distinguishing properties that belong to it.

III. The fear of God then is a principle of the most general use, and is level to every man's understanding. Curious speculations concerning the nature of virtue, refined disquisitions into its origin, and descriptions of its beauty, are far above the reach and capacity of the bulk of mankind; and many of them

have rather thrown obscurity than light upon the subject. But the knowledge of the fear of God is not the work of learning, or the production of subtlety; but it grows up with our reason, and is the foundation of natural conscience, which tells every man, that he is accountable for his actions, and which it is not in his power to stifle and suppress. And although this religious fear will become a more rational and active principle, in proportion as our conceptions of the divine nature are just and true, yet no man can have sufficient cause to plead want of information in this particular, since the glorious light of the gospel has been diffused throughout the world. For this has explained every thing that wanted explanation, relative either to the nature or the dispensations of God; and has made that knowledge familiar to the unlearned, which the wisdom of the wisest could never attain to.

The fear of God is a principle likewise, of all other, the best suited to the nature and condition of man. The desire of happiness is inseparable from a rational and self-conscious being; and his nature directs him to pursue it by every method which right reason can prescribe. And both nature and reason will direct him to pursue that happiness which is substantial, permanent, and secure. But it is God alone who can make this happiness the consequence and the reward of virtue. Virtue therefore must pay an unlimited obedience and honour to him, from whom it is to receive a mighty recompense of reward. Nor does it cease to be virtue for having this recompense in view. The nature of virtue is not altered by super-inducing stronger obligations to the practice of it, which make it our duty, or because duty leads to happiness; nor is the virtuous man less virtuous, if he cannot renounce his nature, but has respect both to the obligations and to the reward of virtue at the same time. Our condition and circumstances, as well as our nature, direct us to the same religious principle. We are the creatures of God, brought into life by his power, and sustained in it, every moment of our existence, by his providence. To him we are indebted for all our faculties, enjoyments, and hopes. We cannot escape his inspection, withdraw ourselves from his government, or throw off our dependence. We are moreover weak and im-

potent: we are surrounded with innumerable dangers, and are liable to accidents, every hour of our lives, which we can neither foresee nor prevent. We have not strength sufficient to engage with those evils which we cannot avoid; nor will our fortitude bear us up under the pressure of them, when they are grievous and perhaps incurable. We are likewise frail and irresolute. We cannot maintain our virtue against strong temptations and treacherous allurements; and our own hearts will betray us, and give a ready admission to vice, when it puts on every appearance that can please and deceive. Our existence therefore and dependence make the religious principle natural to us; our obligations call for it; and our weakness and frailty require its assistance.

This consideration suggests the last property I shall mention belonging to this principle, which is the great power and prevalence of it, in giving support to virtue in all possible cases and emergencies. For consider, I beseech you, once more, what the fear of God imports. It consists in that awful reverence and honour, which is due to the Majesty of the Great Creator, Preserver, and Ruler of the world; in that trust and affiance which arises from the wisdom and rectitude of his government; in that filial veneration, love, and gratitude, which is owing to the affectionate care and constant protection of his providence; and in a submissive confidence and hope, that he who hath redeemed us by his mercy, and who sanctifies us by his grace, will safely conduct us, through all the changes and chances of this mortal life, to glory and honour and immortality. Upon this basis we shall stand secure; with this armour our virtues will be impregnable. For under the mighty protection of this principle, we shall have much greater strength than our own; God himself, so long as we have the fear of him before our eyes, will be our defence, and no enemy can approach to hurt us. All the flattering allurements of vice will lose their charms: no difficulties will discourage; no dangers will affright; no sufferings will dispirit us. It is a guard that prosperity cannot corrupt; a wall, which adversity cannot beat down. It is the safeguard and ornament of youth; will restrain its unruly passions, and turn its follies into sobriety. It gives stability to the perfect man.

man, and places his feet upon a rock; for it will fix his views upon true happiness, will direct his judgment in the pursuit of it, and order his affections and will aright. It is the support and comfort of old age; a comfort that will not forsake us, but will increase as our strength faileth, when we have no longer any relish for worldly enjoyments, and the enchantment of pleasure is at an end. But, above all, in that awful hour, which tries the strength and worth of every principle; when there is no support in any other, as they can give no assurance, but that the man and his virtues must die together; then will he find the religious principle strong even in death. It will open to him the near prospect of heaven: it will dismiss his soul with a sure and certain hope, that he shall never die, and that his virtues will follow him into his everlasting habitation. The fear of God will now introduce him into the presence of God, where inconceivable happiness will be the reward of his obedience, where virtue is arrayed with glory.

S E R M O N VIII.

The Lenity of the Gospel to Sinners,
no Encouragement to the Practice
of Sin.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, at
Christ Church, Oct. 16th, 1768.]

JOHN, viii. 10, 11.

When Jesus had lift up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord: and Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more.

THE woman, with whom our Saviour holds this conversation, had been taken in adultery, and was brought to him by the Scribes and Pharisees, to see what judgment he would pass upon her. The fact, it appears, was evident, and the guilty woman has nothing to say in her defence. Yet you see that she escapes condemnation, and is dismissed with a gentle admonition, to be no more guilty of the like offence. Surely, this woman had the good fortune to meet with a very merciful judge; or if we take our estimate of the crime from the sentence given

in the case, adultery must seem to be a more venial sin than the world judges it, or the scriptures declare it to be. For it has in all times and countries been looked upon as one of the worst of crimes, deserving the most severe rigour of the law; and among the Jews it was punished with death. The Christian dispensation likewise holds it in the greatest abhorrence, denounces God's wrath against it, and tells us, that God will judge adulterers, who can have no place in heaven, without earnest and particular repentance. There must be something peculiar therefore in the case before us, which induced our Saviour to treat this great offender with so much lenity; for he never could intend to give the least encouragement to sins of the like nature, or indeed to any sins whatsoever, by seeming to make light of them, and to lessen the guilt and malignity of them in the eyes of men.

Now we shall clearly find the reason of our Saviour's proceeding, in the intention which the Scribes and Pharisees had in bringing this unhappy woman before him. Read the whole relation of this affair, and you will find that they did it with an insidious design of raising matter of accusation against him. He very well knew, they never came near him but with an intent to entangle him in his discourse. They had often tried their skill this way, and always with the same success. Their plots constantly turned out to their own disgrace and confusion, and they were caught in their own snares. Their present scheme, it is true, was laid with great art, and they might probably think, there was no way for him to escape. *Master, say they, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act: now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned; but what sayest thou?* This they said tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. If he had declared himself against putting the law of Moses in execution, they would have accused him to the people; with whom, they well knew, he must lose his reputation and authority if he had not supported the law, which they held in the highest veneration. Had he told them, that sentence ought to pass upon the woman, as the law of Moses ordained, they would have accused him to the Romans for flying in the face of that power to which they were then subject; and would not

suffer them to exercise any authority, or execute any laws further than they were pleased to permit. It is probable they were restrained in this very instance, since it was not agreeable to the Roman practice, to punish adultery with death.

But observe how easy it was for the divine wisdom of Christ to elude the artful wiles of these treacherous men. He seemed, for some time, to pay no regard to their question; expressing thereby a just contempt for the proposers of it. But as they continued to repeat it, he at last told them, *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.* As if he had said, you have brought this woman here to me, out of appearance of great detestation of the wickedness she has been guilty of, and of zeal for the law of God. And you have brought her for my judgment, who do not pretend to sit in the seat of judgment; and in a case too already determined by the law of Moses. How far you are at liberty to put that law in force, you are the best judges. And whether the pure love of virtue, and a regard for the honour of God, be the true motive of your proceedings with this woman, must be decided by your own consciences. If you think that virtue and chastity will be too much discouraged by sparing this immodest offender, let him that is entirely innocent take upon himself, if he thinks fit, the place and office of a witness, as Moses appointed, and let him cast the first stone at her.

By this means you see, that our blessed Saviour plainly avoided the snare that was laid for him; and the accusers being entirely disappointed, and being convicted in their own consciences, that they had not innocence and purity of heart sufficient to justify them in lifting up their hand against the criminal, they went out one by one; which Jesus gave them an opportunity of doing unobserved, by stooping down again and writing upon the ground. *When Jesus had lift up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee; though they have brought thee before me, I do not assume the character and office of a magistrate. It is for them, and not for me, to put the penal laws in execution. Thy accusers are gone; and if thou hast escaped the*

punishment due to thy crime, make a wife and happy use of thy good fortune; *go, and sin no more.*

You now perceive, by this plain representation of the case, how little it was in our Saviour's intention, to take off any restraint the laws of God or man have contrived, to prevent the commission of any grievous sins, or to give any encouragement to the commission of them, by treating them with less severity than they deserve. Merciful, humane, and gentle as our Lord was to sinners, he always had the greatest abhorrence, and has taught us to have the greatest abhorrence, of sin. The Pharisees indeed were offended at him, and reproached him for admitting publicans and harlots to his presence, and for conversing with them in a mild and familiar manner. Their zeal and pride made them think, that he debased the character of a Prophet by such behaviour, and gave public encouragement to vice. But how injurious were these suspicions! When he conversed with sinners, it was not to confirm them in their sins, but to call them to repentance. And whenever he saw any tendency to reformation, any inclination to virtue, arising in the minds of great offenders, he seized the opportunity, and happily improved it to their entire conversion, inviting and receiving the returning prodigal, with all the affection and tenderness of a delighted father.

Peruse (and you cannot peruse too often) that divine sermon of our Saviour upon the mount; and then say, whether instead of relaxing the ties of duty, and the strictness of moral virtue, he has not, on the contrary, required greater exactness and purity of manners in his disciples. The Jewish Scribes and interpreters of the law looked no farther than the letter of it, and were satisfied with external performances. But our Master has taught us, that virtue consists, not in the constraint of the outward action, but in the inward principle; and that our obedience to the commands of God can then only be sincere and perfect, when it flows from a purity of heart. *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, thou shalt not commit adultery: I say unto you, that whosoever looketh a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.* Here you have the Christian moral

The want of opportunity, the fear of punishment, the apprehension of consequences injurious to your reputation or interest, and many other reasons of this sort, may restrain you from corrupting or violating a wife's or a virgin's chastity: and it is well for society, that there are such restraints as these. But there is nothing of religion in all this. God, who sees the heart, will judge by the heart; and if that be tainted with impurity, if thy thoughts indulge themselves in loose desires, and thy eyes are full of adultery, our Saviour has told thee, that thou hast committed adultery in thy heart, and hast broken the seventh commandment.

Our blessed Lord, upon other occasions, instructed his hearers where to look for the great source of wickedness and pollution. *Out of the heart, says he, proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnesses, blasphemies; these are the things which defile a man:* there all wickedness is conceived, and there it harbours and corrupts. When it breaks forth into the outward act, it may do more mischief indeed, and may give more scandal; but so long as it secretly lurks in the heart, the man is still defiled; and every one will be accountable to God for those sins, which lie hid in the malevolence of the intention, and the impurity of the thoughts.

And this doctrine, which our Saviour has taught us, is, in truth, agreeable to the sense of our own conscience, which knows, and judges of, every thing that passes within our own breasts. Our thoughts, as well as actions, fall within the notice and jurisdiction of this domestic tribunal; and both must be tried by the same rule, whether it be the law written in our hearts, or the revealed will of God. And as long as this tribunal maintains its authority (and it will maintain it as long, and as far, as nature, reason, and religion can exercise their powers), we must acquit or condemn ourselves, according to the uprightness or depravity of our thoughts and intentions. Where these are perfectly innocent, the actual transgressions of the law, in many cases, are not criminal; but where they are in themselves evil, and want only a favourable opportunity of being carried into execution, we must appear guilty of the intended action in our own impartial judgment, and in that of the great Searcher of Hearts. A man may impose upon

the world by false appearances; and he may endeavour to impose upon himself by frivolous and unavailing artifices, by which he can only stand self-convicted of hypocrisy; for no one can have a real persuasion of his own innocence, so long as his heart is full of evil and corrupt imaginations.

Thus it was with the accusers of the criminal before us. When Jesus bade him that was without sin cast the first stone at her, he gave their conscience the alarm, and they had not power to resist its rebukes. It may be supposed, that none of them had made themselves obnoxious to any public accusation or trial; but they found a sink of iniquity, perhaps of impurity, in their own hearts, however it might be covered over from the eyes of men, and they retreated one by one to hide their remorse and confusion. So naturally does a guilty conscience revolt, and set our sins in array against us, whenever any occasion arises, that awakens thought and reflection. The surface indeed may be smooth, and the waters clear, while the filth lies undisturbed at the bottom; but upon any outward commotion or intestine ferment, *the wicked is like a troubled sea, when it casteth up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.*

But though our Saviour was more disposed, in this instance, to condemn the accusers than the criminal; and thought fit to give a just and effectual rebuke to their wicked malice and treachery; you will still reflect, that it was far from his intention to give any encouragement to the practice of sin upon this occasion, since he is not only an enemy to every kind and degree of wickedness in the action, but has laboured to stifle it in its conception, and to root the very seeds of it, as far as possible, out of the heart of man. Indeed the corruption of men's hearts never imposes so much upon their understanding, as when they endeavour to detract from the guilt of sin, upon the authority of any plea or example they pretend to find in the gospel. And yet how happy have men thought themselves, if they could but contrive to make their sins sit easy upon their minds by this artifice!

It is a common delusion of this kind, for men to secure themselves against the stings of conscience, and the dread of future punishment, by giving to the most scandalous vices they daily commit, the

tender appellation of the sins of infirmity. They quote our Saviour for saying, *the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*; and St. Paul for telling us, that *though the mind is disposed to serve the law of God, yet the flesh gets the mastery, and will serve the law of sin*. And will God be angry with us for those sins, which, from the constitution of our nature, we must unavoidably commit? Has he not given us passions, and are not those passions frequently violent, and strongly solicited and inflamed by many irresistible temptations that are thrown in our way? And as there is no desire in the heart of man, which has not a correspondent gratification provided for it, where can be the great harm of accepting the invitation, when nature itself has so largely provided the entertainment, and not only kindly invites us, but forcibly compels us to partake of the feast?

Under this comfortable argument, which grows stronger and stronger the longer they have indulged themselves in sin, they grow quite secure and easy in their vices, run into all manner of debauchery and riot without remorse, attempt the chastity of the innocent, or throw themselves into the arms of the prostitute. But this argument, however conclusive it may be with the mere sensual man, can never impose upon the rational one. Our gracious Master has indeed not denied us the temperate enjoyment of the good things of this life, and has laid us under no restraints in the use of them, but those of prudence and virtue. And we have no reason to complain of these restraints, because they secure our peace and improve our enjoyments: for nothing but an equitable moderation in our desires and gratifications can secure the peace of the world, by allowing every man his just claim to a share in the advantages and comforts of it; as, on the contrary, an unrestrained and irrational pursuit of pleasures must always be injurious, in a greater or less degree, to the good order, and happiness, and virtue of society. This pursuit is likewise destructive of our own happiness, and is contrary to the very end we have in view: for sensual gratifications, indulged beyond the bounds of reason, transform the man into the brute, and erase out of his mind the very idea of that superior happiness which belongs to the

perfection of his nature. When they are habitual and intemperate, they not only weaken the rational powers, but are destructive of the animal ones. They enfeeble our faculties, and nature itself sinks under the excess.

And can we suppose, that religion will allow in us the commission of those sins which nature and reason restrain us from? Can that religion especially, which was instituted on purpose to destroy the works of the flesh, and which expressly declares, that none but *the pure in heart shall see God*, be so inconsistent with itself, as to give licence and encouragement to sensuality and vice? Among the works of the flesh St. Paul reckons *adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, hatred, variance, wrath, strife, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like*. And every one of these arise immediately, or, by consequence, from some natural passion; and those that are guilty of any of them, may plead the violence of the temptation, and the particular turn of the constitution and temperament; but is there any allowance made for these, in the Apostle's judgment, when he declares, that *they who do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God*? How can the infirmity of nature be made an excuse for sin, when we are plainly told in the Scriptures, that Christ came into the world, to renew our nature, to heal our infirmities, and to supply the deficiency of our own strength, by the strength of his grace? That the weakness of our nature is not so great as the spirit of God is powerful; nor any temptations so strong, but what his aid will enable us to resist and overcome? That, if we earnestly and continually ask of God the supplies of his grace, and sincerely make use of the means which he has ordained for obtaining them, he will certainly bestow them in a sufficient measure? But if we do despite to the Spirit of Grace; if we desire to have no communication with him, but reject those admonitions and repeated efforts of assistance he frequently gives us even without asking for, the sin lies at our own door, and our condemnation will be the heavier for that very infirmity of nature, which we took no care to correct, but, in defiance of the divine goodness, did every thing in our power to increase.

But the deceitfulness of sin has carried men into errors of still more fatal consequence.

quence. They have endeavoured to make religion itself the patroness of vice, and to destroy the sanctity of the gospel by its own principles. This they have done, by supposing the faith which it requires to supersede the necessity of good works, or the mercy which it displays to give the greater latitude to sin. According to these doctrines, the Christian dispensation is this: "The mercy of God is infinite; the sufferings of Christ have satisfied his justice; receive him by faith, and live as you please; either you cannot sin, or your sins will not be imputed."

God forbid, that the gospel should contain a scheme so favourable to a vicious and licentious life as this! Faith in Christ, without doubt, denominates a Christian, and entitles him to the privileges of redemption. For he can have no title to pardon and salvation, who disowns the authority of the person that offers them, and rejects the dispensation under which they must be claimed. But this faith, if it be genuine, is the root of all virtue and goodness; which it feeds, and nourishes, and carries to maturity. It is that which makes our good works acceptable to God, and gives them a title to a reward through the merits of our Redeemer. It sanctifies morality, but it does not alter its nature, or dispense with its obligation. The moral law is a law to all mankind; and the transgression of it is sin in the believer and unbeliever, the regenerate and unregenerate; only with this difference, that it is the greater sin in those who have the best opportunity of knowing and doing their duty. The faith, which removes mountains, cannot remove the boundaries of virtue and vice: they are essentially and invariably distinguished from each other, and no change of persons or circumstances can confound their nature. They must be the objects of God's favour or displeasure in a proportionate degree, wherever they are found; and, therefore, where vice prevails, all pretences to election are vain and presumptuous; for it is impossible that any man can be the favourite of God, so long as he disobey the law of God. If we are saved by faith, it is the faith which produces good works, and sanctifies the fruit which it produces. And if it produces evil fruit, it is not the tree which Christ hath planted. For he has expressly told us, that grapes will as soon grow upon thorns, and

figs upon thistles, as vice of any kind will grow upon the true faith of a Christian.

But should the deluded sinner fail in this notion, that faith not only excuses, but purifies the immoral actions of a believer, he then has recourse to the mercy of God, which extends, through the satisfaction of Christ, to the remission of the sins of all that receive him. And they seem to think, that they pay a compliment to his mercy, when they multiply offences, that it may have the greater opportunity of displaying itself in the pardon of them, for the sake of his beloved Son. *They continue in sin, that grace may abound.*

When men will not part with their vices, and want to get rid of their fears, what strange notions do they take up of the nature of the Christian religion! How foolishly do they endeavour to reconcile the two most irreconcilable things in the world, a state of sin, and a state of grace! Strange! that it should ever enter into the heart of man to conceive, that Christ shed his most precious blood, not to reconcile sinners to God, but to reconcile God to sin, and that the kingdom of Satan should be erected upon that merciful dispensation which was contrived purposely to destroy it. The gospel, we know very well, is the gracious publication of pardon to all who embrace it. But none can embrace it who do not repent of their sins, and forsake them. It requires a stricter morality, and a greater sanctity of life, in all who are willing to claim the privileges of it; and it aggravates the guilt, and will increase the condemnation, of every sinner, whose conversion is not agreeable to the purity of his profession. No: lay the blame of your iniquities and vices where it ought to be laid—upon the depravity of your own hearts: lay it, if you please, upon the corruption of your nature, which you will not ask, which you will not suffer; the holy spirit of God to cleanse and cure; lay it upon the perverse obstinacy of your own will: but charge it not upon God; charge it not upon the Son of God, or upon his doctrine, that they have ever furnished you with any plea or pretence, whereby any licence or encouragement is given to sin, or the least hope of security in the commission of it. Read the gospel from one end to the other, and you will find, that when grace and mercy

are offered to any transgressors, the condition of their pardon carries in it the same admonition as our Lord gave the woman, *go, and sin no more.*

Instances, no doubt, there are in Scripture (and blessed be God for his great mercy!) of remission granted to the worst of sins, and forgiveness to the most profligate sinners. But in all these cases, there appear the most evident tokens of a penitent and contrite heart. You have in the gospel the representation of a young man, who was grown impatient of continuing under the restraint of good discipline, and the care of a prudent father. He wanted the assignment of his portion, which he no sooner got into his hands, but he travels into a far country; where, forgetting the sober maxims of a virtuous education, and running headlong into all the fashionable vices of the place, he associated with loose companions and harlots, and wasted his substance with riotous living. His extravagance and vices soon brought him to penury; and his extreme penury and distress restored him to his senses. *And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.* Here you find a real change of the heart, and an entire reformation. Here was a truly humble and penitent disposition in the returning prodigal; and this he declared it to be, at his father's feet, with self-abhorrence and confusion of face. Whereupon his compassionate father took him into his arms, and put on him the best robe, and killed the fatted calf, and made a feast, with music and dancing, to celebrate this joyful event. But all this, you perceive, was not barely for the return of the son, but for the recovery of the sinner; *for he had been dead, and was alive again, had been lost, and was found.*

You read likewise in the gospel, of a woman, *which was a sinner*; that is, one who had led a vicious and profligate life; who, when Jesus sat at meat in one of the Pharisee's houses, *stood at his feet behind him, weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and*

anointed them with ointment. The tears, which this penitent shed in such abundance, flowed from the truest sorrow and contrition of heart; and it was upon that account that they did not flow in vain. She no sooner heard where her Saviour was, but she ran to him for help, and, with streaming eyes and dishevelled hair, wanted to know how she might atone for her lost innocence, and whether she might hope for pardon. The blessed Jesus, whose arms were always open to receive the returning sinner, gave her the comfort she so much stood in need of; and told her, though her sins were many, that all the offences of her past life were forgiven; and dismissed her with this reviving assurance, *thy faith hath saved thee; thy faith, which hath produced such unfeigned repentance, hath saved thee; go in peace.*

In short; if you search the Scriptures for any palliatives or excuses for sin; for any thing that will lessen the guilt of it; or the severity of God's vengeance against it; or for any hopes of salvation, so long as you continue knowingly and wilfully in the commission of it, you will search them in vain. You will find nothing there, but the most express denunciations of indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil; upon every presumptuous and incorrigible offender, *who will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.* But if you search in them to see what encouragement is given to repentance, you will find such earnest calls, such affectionate invitations to the greatest sinners, that they would be converted and live; and so many examples of such as have been received to mercy and favour, as plainly shew, that there are no sins too great for God to forgive, or for Christ to atone for, if they are truly repented of and forsaken. But they must be repented of and forsaken, before the mercy of God, or the merits of Christ, can give you any assurance, any expectation of forgiveness. *Seek ye, therefore, the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

S E R M O N IX.

Faith the Basis of all Christian Virtues.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, at Christ Church, April 29th, 1770.]

2 PET. I. 5, 6, 7.

Add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity.

In these words the Apostle has connected, in a regular and artificial gradation, all the several virtues that form the life, and complete the character, of a Christian. They are not thrown together in a confused and disorderly manner, but are judiciously placed in a proper and well-disposed arrangement. The first link of the chain is fixed to the throne of God; and the rest hang by each other, supporting, and being supported by those to which they are immediately joined. This orderly assemblage is suggested to us by the etymology of the word *ἐπιχορηγία*; which imports something more than the bare addition of one virtue to another; it denotes the introduction of them in concert with, and in aid of each other, so as to form a complete circle or crown of virtues; for so is the word *χώρας* (*χώρας*—*κύκλος*, *σφαῖρα*). Hesych.) explained by Hesychius. The truth of this representation will appear, by taking an accurate view of the virtues enumerated in my text in the order in which they lie.

I. The first in the catalogue is faith; which is laid down by the Apostle as the principle upon which all that follow, in a due subordination, depend. But as we must be cautious and careful in establishing a principle, which is made the great support of all the essential duties of Christianity, it concerns us to avoid all mistakes in our notions of it; and the more so, as faith is known to be a word that bears different senses in the New Testament. Without inquiring what senses it does not bear in my text, I shall lay before you that which it does; and that you may be sure it is the true one, St. Peter himself shall explain it to you.

In the first verse of this chapter, he

makes mention of the faith, which is common to all true Christians, to whom he says it is alike precious; i. e. it equally entitles them to its valuable claims and privileges; *not through their own righteousness, but through the righteousness of God, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ*. The object of this faith, he tells us at the third and fourth verses, are *the exceeding great and precious promises*, assured to us by the power of God, through the knowledge of Christ, by which we are called to glory and virtue, and are thereby made partakers of the divine nature. He then enumerates the virtues which are dependent upon this faith; and exhorts the brethren to use all diligence to make their calling and election sure, by the practice of them; the never-failing consequence and reward of which, will be an entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We find the same notion of faith in St. Peter's first epistle. At the third verse of the first chapter, he describes the state of Christians to be that of those, *whom God, by his abundant mercy, had begotten again unto a lively hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us*. The joys of heaven are here represented to be the objects of a Christian's hope. But hope has its foundation in faith; and the objects of both must be the same: for we must believe a thing to be attainable, before we can hope to attain it. They are accordingly, at the twenty-first verse, both joined together, and stand upon the same foundation, that of Christ's resurrection. For we are there said to believe in God, *who raised up Jesus from the dead, and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God*. And, at the ninth verse, he expressly declares the end, or ultimate aim of our faith to be the salvation of our souls. By this it appears, that the faith, which is the foundation of virtue, is a firm reliance upon the promises of God, for the enjoyment of a blessed immortality, made known to us by the revelation of the gospel, procured through the righteousness, and assured to us by the resurrection, of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

This is the true faith of a Christian, to which all the great and precious promises of the gospel belong. All other intermediate acts of faith are subordinate to this, which is the ultimate end and perfection of

of the gospel; and they have no value, but as they lead to, and center in, this great and operative principle of religion. For although we believe Jesus to be the Messiah foretold and described in the ancient prophecies; though we believe him to be the eternal Son of God, whose power was made manifest to the world in signs and wonders and mighty works; though we receive the gospel as an authentic relation of his life and words and actions;—yet if these acts of faith did not open to us the prospect of everlasting life, and direct our views and hopes towards the happiness of heaven, our faith would be a mere speculative amusement in matters wherein we had no concern, and from which we could receive no possible advantage. The ultimate faith of a Christian therefore is that which terminates in the promises of God, and the glory which is hereafter to be revealed.

II. The Apostle having thus laid the basis of the Christian life in faith, he then directs us how to raise upon it the structure of moral virtue. *Add to your faith, virtue.* Some expositors considering, that the original word *Ἀρετή* often denotes military virtue, which consists in bravery and fortitude; and that the Christian state is properly represented to be a state of warfare, have confined it to this sense. And the connection is well preserved by it. For in times of trial and conflict, courage and constancy are necessary supports to faith. But others, and I think truly, understand it in its more common and general sense; in which it is used by St. Paul, on a similar occasion, in his epistle to the Philippians, chap. iv. ver. 8. where he recommends virtue at large, and distinguishes the several branches of it in the very same manner as St. Peter in my text will be found to do.

The connection between faith and the general practice of virtue needs no illustration. For since faith is a religious reliance upon the promises of God, for the future possession of a blessed immortality, made known to us by the revelation of the gospel, and procured for us through the merits of Christ; and since the same gospel declares holiness and virtue to be the express conditions upon which the promises of God are founded, it is evident, that faith cannot be divided from

virtue; for it is not the faith of the gospel, nor is it entitled to the rewards of it, if it be barren and unfruitful in the works of righteousness. And in this connection the Christian morality has a support, which was wanting in all the moral systems of the philosophers. They defined virtue, and distinguished the several species of it, with great exactness; they found it to be consonant to nature and reason; and from this consideration alone they deduced our obligations to the practice of it. But was nature so pure, or reason so perfect, as to want no additional enforcements in support of virtue against the corruption of the one, or the weakness and instability of the other? This great omission the gospel has supplied; and the exercise of faith, which fixes our dependence upon the promises of God, and our views upon the happiness of heaven, will keep us steady and immovable in the paths of virtue, so long as we lose not sight of the great recompense of its reward.

III. Knowledge is next introduced, in order to make our faith and virtue complete. This is properly an intellectual endowment, but yet, in the application of it, partakes of a moral nature. For we must know and understand our duty before we can practise it. Knowledge has respect both to faith and virtue; and the wrong and imperfect notions that have been entertained concerning each of these, and which have been very injurious to religion, shew the necessity of our being furnished with it in matters both of belief and practise. We must know the nature and object of our faith; otherwise, it will be an erroneous and deceitful guide: we must know the foundation of it, or, the grounds upon which it is built; otherwise, it will not be rational: we must know the inseparable connection that faith has with virtue; otherwise, it will be vain and useless. Knowledge is no less necessary to give us right apprehensions of the nature and power of virtue. Knowledge, in general, is acquired by the contemplation of truth, and consists in an adequate perception of it. It is necessary therefore to enable us to distinguish real virtue from that which is only such in opinion, and to fix the precise boundaries of moral truth and falsehood. For want of this, many qualities and actions have been deemed virtuous, which

in truth, are of a contrary nature, and have been as detrimental and mischievous to mankind, as the worst of vices.—And knowledge likewise, which is the mother of prudence, is what must regulate the virtues themselves. It is this which fixes them at their true point, that golden mean, where all the virtues arrive at their perfection; for if they fall short of this, or go beyond it, they lose their name and nature.—But the knowledge we gain from revelation will carry us further. Having enlarged our views, and improved our discernment, in the contemplation of virtue; by laying the foundation of it in religion, it has strengthened its obligation, refined its nature, and extended its branches.—Place the principle of virtue, as the Heathen moralists did, in the rectitude and decorum of action, and in social relation only, making it to depend upon the sense of right and wrong, and temporal advantage or disadvantage, of worldly praise or blame; or, superadd to these motives, which the gospel does by no means reject, the fear of God, and a reliance upon his promises for the certain and inestimable rewards of virtue in a future state, and our obligations to the practice of it will rise in the same proportion, as divine sanctions are superior to human.—The gospel has likewise refined and exalted the nature of virtue. For it is there represented as a transcript from him who is the great archetype of all goodness; and it dignifies human nature by an assimilation to the divine. It revives in us the image of our Maker, by taking possession of the heart, and making it its repository. It extends to the regulation of our very thoughts and desires; for the seeds of corruption must be rooted out of our minds, before we can arrive at that state of virtuous perfection, which the gospel requires.—But revealed knowledge has moreover introduced to our acquaintance a new train of the most amiable virtues, to which they must be strangers, whose actions are regulated, how wisely soever, by a regard to the relations and concerns of this life only. For when we have learned to consider ourselves as pilgrims and sojourners in this world, whose inheritance is in a better,—resignation to the will of God; complacency and humility; æquanimity, unmuffled by provocations and injuries; forbearance and forgiveness; meekness,

gentleness, and goodness; contentment and patience; moderation of desires; and a generous contempt of every thing that interferes with our views and hopes of immortality;—all these will be adopted by us, as the genuine virtues and the peculiar ornaments of the Christian state.

By these remarks it appears, that our knowledge of virtue must take in the consideration of its nature, obligation, and extent. In this last respect, it will be of farther use to us, by giving us a distinct and comprehensive division of its several branches. For it is this distribution of the virtues, according to the rules of science, which forms them into a regular system, and at once lays open to our view the whole compass of moral duty. We are not at liberty to suppose, that the virtues which follow are introduced by the Apostle in a careless and confused manner, when they are evidently classed under the general distinction of personal virtues, of those which have God for their object, and of such as relate to man. And there is no impropriety in giving the personal virtues the first place in the catalogue. For to know ourselves is the primary essential knowledge, upon which the knowledge of our relation to other beings, and the duties that arise from it, which take in the whole compass of morality, depend.

IV. The personal virtues are comprized under the general denomination of temperance and patience. The knowledge of ourselves will naturally lead us to temperance; or as the original word *ἐγκράτεια* properly signifies, the command and government of ourselves in the use and enjoyment of the good things of this life. For if we know that our passions and appetites are eager in the pursuit of such gratifications as are suited to their respective cravings, we know likewise that we are in possession of a superior faculty, whose business it is to watch over and control their irregularities and excesses. And we shall think it fit and right, that a blind impulse, which has no power of self-restraint, should be put under the conduct of reason. From knowing ourselves, we shall likewise know the advantages of a regular self-government. Our frame and constitution require it, in order to preserve the vigour and harmony of our faculties both in body and mind. It is this which gives us the true enjoyment

ment of life, and is the parent of health, and peace, and joy.—Beyond this, the knowledge of ourselves supposes the knowledge of our origin and dependence; from which the personal virtues receive a stronger enforcement and obligation. For we must be accountable for our conduct to our maker and governor: and it is the will of him who made us rational creatures, that we should act agreeably to reason. So that it is not left to our own prudence and discretion, whether we will retain the command of ourselves or not; but it is a matter of strict duty; and whenever we deviate in our self-government from the rule of right reason, we transgress the law of God.—But this class of virtues is still further improved, and receives an additional force, by the knowledge we gain from revelation. For as we are thereby taught, that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost, whose residence prepares and fits us for immortality; we must necessarily cleanse our hearts from all evil and corrupt affections, and furnish them with the virtues of temperance and sobriety, continence and chastity, moderation of desires and purity of thoughts, before they can be qualified for the reception of this heavenly guest, and be honoured with the habitation of God through the spirit.

V. Was this world the constant and unvaried scene of a regular enjoyment of the blessings of life, temperance, in its comprehensive signification, would be the only personal virtue we should have occasion to put in practice. But the great and various troubles and misfortunes, incident to our nature and situation, have made patience a necessary and useful virtue. This is no other than the right government of ourselves in adversity, as temperance is in prosperity. In lighter afflictions the spirit of a man may sustain his infirmities; but when the trial is severe, how is this command of ourselves to be acquired; where is this difficult virtue of patience to be learned? Our natural fortitude will fail us, when it has itself no support; when we look around us, and there is no remedy to be found without; when we search our own spirit, and there is no consolation from within. Our sufferings will beat down the powers of nature and reason, and sink us into the misery of despair. Nevertheless, our case is not desperate: there is still a remedy

to be found in patience; but it must be in Christian patience; and this is no where to be learned but in the rudiments of the gospel. For the good Christian is there taught to consider afflictions not merely as natural evils, but as the chastisements of our Heavenly Father; insisted for the correction of sin, or for the trial and improvement of virtue. And when he sees afflictions in this light, a patient resignation to the will of God, a confidence in the divine protection, and a view to the increase of the recompense of his reward, will be his support and comfort, and make him more than conqueror in all the fiery trials of adversity.

VI. This shews the intimate connection and union that patience has with piety; and therefore godliness is next introduced by the Apostle in its due place and order. The original word *σωφροσύνη* denotes the reverence, adoration, and honour we owe to the Supreme Being, on account of the several relations we stand in to him. The good Centurion Cornelius is said to have been *σωφρον*, a man of piety, and one that feared God. This is the character of a truly religious man. And therefore godliness, or the fear of God (which is an equivalent expression) comprehends all the offices of piety, all the religious duties which are due to God, as *the maker of all things, the judge of all men, and the father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Christian knowledge has enlarged this branch of duty likewise, and made it more fruitful. The light of reason had discovered to those few, who would suffer themselves to be guided by it, the being and attributes of God; whom they found in his works, and acknowledged him to be their father and governor, preserver and benefactor. The duties arising from these relations are obvious, and easy to be deduced. And yet the fact is certain, that though they knew God, they honoured him not as God, neither obeyed him, nor did they worship him in the manner that the purity and holiness of his nature required. How much then are we indebted to the gospel, which has confirmed and published to the whole world the true principles of natural religion in this its primary and fundamental article; has taught us to pay a reasonable service to our Maker in spirit and in truth; and has moreover included all the virtues in that service, by making them

them duties, and referring the obligation of them to the supreme author of every good work? But the gospel has gone further, and has discovered to us a new relation we stand in to God, as our redeemer. For all the duties (including those of a positive nature) which gratitude and affection can pay, in return for the most amazing instance of infinite mercy and love, as an offering acceptable to God, which purity of heart and fervour of devotion must sanctify, are bound upon us by the gospel, and make an essential part of Christian morality.

The virtues that follow and close the train are the social ones. And these have a necessary connection with piety; for *he who loveth God must love his brother also*. If we consider ourselves as Christians and the children of God by adoption and grace, united by one spirit, under one common Lord and Master, partakers of the same redemption, and heirs of the same salvation, brotherly love and kindness cannot be separated from such an intimate relation and conjunction. And if we consider God as the common father of mankind, who embraces all his children with the tenderness and affection of a father, and is kind even to the disobedient and unthankful, we must break the ties of our own relation to him, if we are not kind and tender towards those who are the children of God; if we do not cultivate a spirit of universal benevolence and charity. Add therefore to godliness, first of all, brotherly kindness—*φιλανθρωπία*, or the love of our Christian brethren. For this appellation is in the New Testament, appropriated to Christians.

VII. The relation, that Christians stand in to one another, produces so intimate a union, that it is compared by St. Paul to that which subsists between the members of the same natural body; wherein one common sensation is diffused throughout the whole, and *if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; and if one member rejoice, all the members rejoice with it*. And our Saviour illustrates it by the union of the branches in a vine, which, deriving their sustenance from the same root, are all partakers of one common life. These comparisons shew, not only that it is unreasonable, but that it is unnatural and impossible, for those who are members of the body of Christ, and are ac-

tuated by the true spirit of his religion, ever to be wanting in fellow-feeling, in affection and kindness towards their Christian brethren. For this reason, our blessed Saviour has declared love to be the distinguishing badge and characteristic of the Christian profession; so that he who divides his interest from that of the community, and breaks that bond of union which holds it together in one spirit, under one head, has in effect detached himself from it, and is no longer a branch of the same heavenly vine, no longer a member of the same spiritual body. The nature of this union is different from, and superior in kind to, any other. By the spirit of Christ, which diffuses itself through all the members of his church militant and triumphant, it connects us not only with all his faithful followers upon earth, but with the blessed saints in heaven. It results from the relation that spirits immortal, joint heirs of one common salvation have to each other; and is a spiritual and sacred union, which neither death nor time can dissolve.

VIII. But as an intimate union in separate societies, especially when they are distinguished by peculiar privileges and honours, is apt to produce a disregard and contempt of all other men, who have not the same pre-eminence of distinction, the Apostle has added charity, or universal benevolence, as a proper supplement to brotherly love; and with this he closes the catalogue of Christian virtues.—Charity, in this sense, comprehends all the social virtues, which depend upon our relation to one another as men, connected by various ties in this life. And this relation, at the same time that it takes in all mankind, subsists betwixt Christians themselves. Hence arise the natural duties of parental, filial, and conjugal relation; and those which we owe to our neighbours, or to all men, with whom we have any interest or concern. To these we must perform all acts of humanity, benevolence, and kindness, as the relation is more near or remote, and as our respective situations and circumstances require. No clashing of interest, no difference of religious opinions, no distinctions of country or party, will exempt us from these. So general is the gospel law of good-will towards men, that it extends to our very enemies. It requires

us to forgive their injuries, and as far as prudence, the guide of every virtue, will permit, to retaliate them with beneficence. But the description given of charity by St. Paul, will best shew the nature and extent of this virtue. *Charity suffereth long and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things; believeth all things; hopeth all things; endureth all things.* How extensive is this virtue, and how fruitful of blessings to mankind! It cuts up by the root all the causes of contention and mischief. It drives from the heart of man, pride, hatred, and envy; impatience and anger, peevish animosities, suspicions and jealousies. It plants in the room of them, the love of truth and justice; integrity, equity, and moderation; kindness and forbearance; candour and condescension; a courteous disposition, and a decent and obliging behaviour. Thus does our religion endeavour to secure, by this excellent and comprehensive virtue of charity, the good order and peace and happiness of this world, whilst it opens to us the prospect of a better.

I have now gone through the several virtues enumerated in my text, which form a complete and perfect system of the Christian morality; and I have endeavoured to shew, that they are judiciously ranged, by an artificial gradation, in a regular dependence one upon another. It has indeed generally been allowed, that the Apostle's catalogue of virtues is complete; but I think sufficient attention has not been given to the propriety of their order and disposition. It has been my principal aim to do justice to the Apostle in this point, without offering any violence to the strict and proper sense of the words, or forcing them into an unnatural connection.

This connection may perhaps be further illustrated and confirmed, by comparing St. Peter's system of Christian morality with that of St. Paul's before mentioned, as he has given it us at the 8th verse of the 4th chapter of his epistle to the Philipians. In the foregoing chapter (vid. verse 9, 10, 14.), he has laid the same foundation of a Christian's life and conversation, as St. Peter has done, in faith;

and, in like manner, he makes the glories of a future state the object of it. Upon this foundation he builds his system of moral virtues, in the following order: *Whatsoever things are true, and honest, and just, and pure; these we are to think upon and regard as the essential duties of Christianity: And whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, these are the ornamental graces of it.* By truth St. Paul denotes the general nature of virtue; moral truth and virtue being one and the same thing. For truth in speculation is virtue in practice. And therefore knowledge, which consists in the perception and discovery of truth, is that which must lead us to virtue. He then resolves the general idea of virtue into its several species, comprized under the terms, honest, just, and pure. It would be impossible not to see that this division comprehends the three great branches of duty, which relate to God, to man, and to ourselves, did not the wrong translation of the word *σεμνός* (honest) mislead us, and preposterously introduce a very illogical distribution of the Apostle's subject. It properly denotes, in this place, whatsoever things are the object of religious veneration. For this acceptance of the word, we have the authority of Heathen, Jewish, and Christian writers, who frequently use it as an appellation belonging to the most solemn acts and mysteries of religion, to the laws, to the temple, and to the name of God. In this sense it answers to the *νὸς* of St. Peter. They are both derived from the same root; and though they both admit a latitude of construction, yet in their strict and original signification, which we have no reason to depart from, they are descriptive of some religious or devout act, performed with an intention to honour God thereby. The foundation therefore of virtue, and the division of it into its several species, is the same in both the Apostles. For though the words are different, yet in their extended sense they are of the same import. For as brotherly love and charity evidently oblige us to all acts of justice, so justice extends to all acts of brotherly love and charity; for all men have, in a due proportion, a strict right and claim to these; and it is an act of injustice not to pay them their dues, as different relations and circumstances require. And purity bears a sense equivalent to that of temperance. For all indul-

indulgences in pleasures of any kind, inconsistent with a regular self-government, are sensuality: and all sensuality, in the Scripture account, is impurity and pollution. And all the subordinate virtues will range themselves alike under the correspondent branches of the general division of each of the Apostle's systems. St. Paul indeed seems to have given his virtues an additional improvement, by requiring the embellishment of that decorum and grace which are necessary to make virtue amiable and attractive. But this improvement, though not expressed by St. Peter, is necessarily implied. For, in truth, it is an appendage inseparable from Christian virtue. For whosoever is possessed of the true spirit of Christianity, and duly cultivates the virtues that are peculiar to it, will, of course, have his mind and manners framed to gentleness and decency, to grace and goodness; and that behaviour, which is formed by the heart, and is the natural result of all those lovely virtues, which make up the train of charity, will have more genuine gracefulness in it, will be more engaging and amiable, than its counterfeit, which consists in appearances only, is acquired by art, and is oftentimes false and deceitful.

Thus have these two great Apostles, concurring in the same general plan, and in a similar disposition of the parts, raised upon a solid foundation a complete and beautiful structure of moral virtue in just symmetry and proportion. It is our duty, and it will be our happiness, to contemplate this regular and comprehensive system of virtues; to fix them in our memories and minds, and to transcribe them into our practice. There is a mutual connection betwixt them, and a dependence one upon another. We cannot leave a single virtue of the scale, without breaking the chain that reaches from heaven to earth, and by which we must ascend from earth to heaven. After we have washed away our sins by repentance, it is the integrity and uniformity of a virtuous conduct, that must raise us to Christian perfection, and entitle us to the prize of our high calling. We can build our hopes of it upon no other foundation than that which is laid, namely, faith in Christ Jesus; and if faith is our guide to virtue, virtue will lead us to glory.

S E R M O N X.

A proper Resurrection of the Body,
the primitive Faith of God's
People from the earliest Ages.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, at
Christ Church, Feb. 16th, 1772.]

MATTHEW, xxii. 31, 32.

But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying; I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living

THE Sadducees, it is well known, were a sect among the Jews, who denied the resurrection of the dead. This error seems to have been founded in other wrong notions which they had adopted, namely, that no Scriptures had authority to establish any doctrines which were not contained in the writings of Moses; and that in these no discovery had been made of any resurrection. It appears, by St. Matthew's narrative, that some of this sect came to encounter our Saviour upon this point of doctrine; and imagined, no doubt, that they should puzzle him with an argument, which, according to their notions of a resurrection, seemed a very shrewd one. It was that of a woman having had seven husbands in her lifetime; the question was, whose wife she should be in the resurrection? Here again was another mistake; for they supposed that, if there was any such thing as another world, men would carry with them into it the same passions, appetites, and affections, as were natural to them in this; and that sensual gratifications were to make the chief part of their happiness there.

All these errors our blessed Lord, in his reply, takes upon him to correct. In doing this, he first lays open to them the source of their fundamental and capital mistake, in rejecting the doctrine of a resurrection. *Ye do err, says he, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.* Which words, with those that follow, may be thus illustrated. If God has power to raise the dead to life again, and has declared that he will raise them, then this article of faith is established upon a sure foundation. Of the former you can

can have no reasonable doubt; for to make a man originally out of the dust of the earth, and to raise him up again out of the same dust, are evidently similar acts of the same power. Of the latter you have the evidence not only of the Scriptures, which you reject in this case without cause, but even of those which you admit; as I shall presently shew you. In the mean time I must observe, that you are greatly mistaken in your notion of a resurrection. The relations which are necessary in this life will have no place in the next: the faculties of man will be there suited to his situation; and he will be like the angels of God in heaven, having undergone such a change both of soul and body, as will qualify him for the everlasting enjoyment of celestial happiness. And the reality of this future state, which you disbelieve, you may collect from the writings even of Moses himself. Consider the words which were spoken unto you, or for your information, by God, when he said, *I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*. These words certainly denote an eminent degree of God's favour and blessing bestowed, or intended to be bestowed, upon these patriarchs. But it does not appear, that they were distinguished by worldly blessings in such a manner, as to give a reason to think them, in this respect, the peculiar favourites of Heaven. They had in this world as great a share of trouble and afflictions as other men. One of them in particular declared, in his old age, *few and evil, or unhappy, have the days of my life been*. The happiness, therefore, which these righteous men found not upon earth, must have been reserved for them in a better country, that is, an heavenly. Immortality must have been the object of their views, and the intended reward of their faith: *for God is not the God of the dead; who had a short, temporal, painful existence; but of the living, who shall exist in happiness for ever*.

Here then you have the great moral argument for a state of future retribution, arising from the insufficiency and defects of it in this life, confirmed and authenticated by the declaration of God himself. And we must allow the argument to be as clear as it is decisive for a future state of retribution. But the thing to be proved was, the resurrection of the body; of

which the argument is not a direct proof, if the souls of men are supposed to survive them, and are capable of constituting such a self-conscious personality as will subject them to rewards or punishments hereafter. This, we know, was the opinion of some of the philosophers, who rejected the notion of a resurrection with scorn. To these, therefore, our Saviour's argument for it would have been by no means conclusive. But it was conclusive to those who thought the doctrine of a future state to be inseparably connected with that of the resurrection. And of the reality of this connection the Jews, at the time of our Saviour's appearance, were universally persuaded. And not only so, but the same persuasion had prevailed among the people of God, from the earliest ages of the world.

It will be no improper employment of our time, as it will be an illustration and confirmation of our Saviour's argument, if we endeavour to investigate the origin of this notion, and to learn what foundation it stands upon in holy writ.

It cannot, with any degree of probability, be supposed, that the doctrine of a resurrection took its rise from any imagination or conception of man. It is a thing contrary to all sense and experience. Death has reigned over all men from the beginning of the world, and will reign, as long as the world shall endure. And of all that are gone down to the grave, no one ever was known to return, nor was it ever surmized that any will return, from any possible effort of nature. Nature indeed has furnished us with hopes, and reason with a persuasion, *that the spirit will return unto God who gave it*. But of the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, nature has no support, and reason is bewildered in the contemplation of it. We must therefore necessarily conclude, that the resurrection of the body, which nothing in nature could lead men to the discovery of, and therefore could make no principle of natural religion, must have been revealed by God himself. And if it is a certain truth, as it will appear to be, that as far back as we can trace any notices of the belief of a future state, we shall find the belief of a resurrection united with it, it may reasonably be supposed, that this mode of future existence was first revealed to Adam, and preserved as a tradition received from their

their first parent by the patriarchs and the chosen people of God. Nor did it rest upon tradition only; assurances of it having been renewed at distant times, to several eminent and holy men, before the institution of the Jewish common-wealth, and during the continuance of it. Let us then proceed to inquire what light the Scriptures of the Old Testament (for to these we must have recourse) have thrown upon this subject.

And in this inquiry we must be allowed in some cases to follow our Saviour's manner of reasoning, by arguing from inference rather than from express and positive declarations. And this concession must be particularly claimed in the discovery of the notices, supposed to be given to our first parent of a resurrection. The support of this supposition will rest upon what is recorded in the third chapter of Genesis, where we have the sentence passed upon Adam, and the alleviation of it, immediately after his fall.

When God made known to Adam the punishment of his disobedience, he tells him, *that he was taken out of the ground—that dust he was, and that he should return to dust.* Here then the dissolution and destruction of the body are denounced in the very words of the sentence. But there is likewise an alleviation of the sentence, and a consolation to be derived from it, which must therefore necessarily have a respect to the sentence itself. The serpent, the great seducer, had beguiled man; but he is told, that he would have no reason to triumph in the success of his guile; for he would find an enemy in the seed of the woman, *whose heel he would bruise, but who should bruise his head;* which phrases denote the former to be a curable, however envenomed, the latter to be an incurable and fatal wound. Whether Adam understood the full import of these remarkable words—by whom, and by what wonderful means the wound of man would be healed, and the serpent's treachery avenged—we have no authority from Scripture to determine. But if they were intended to afford any consolation to him in his forlorn and wretched condition (and less than this cannot be supposed), what is it that he could collect from them? (He was sentenced to gain his bread by labour, and to eat it with sorrow, and to lie down in the dust at the end of a miserable life.)

What cure was there for death? or what comfort could he find in any other reflection, than in having the hopes of life being restored to him? And what notion could he have of the restoration of life, but of its being the restoration of the living man, by the re-union of the soul and body, in the same manner as his nature was at first constituted? And it must not escape our observation, that when God made known to Adam, that death was the punishment of his disobedience, he puts him in mind of his origin, and tells him, *that he was taken out of the ground—that dust he was, and that he should return to dust.* This explanation of his existence might afterwards lead him naturally to reflect, that it evidently carried in it the strongest assurance, that the same Divine power, which at first animated the lifeless dust, could most certainly re-animate it in the same manner. From these considerations it may, I think, be reasonably supposed, that if Adam had any assurances given him of a restoration to life, which was the only consolation he could receive under the sentence of death, they were imparted to him under the notion and expectation of the resurrection of the body, and the re-union of the body and soul.

If our first parent was possessed of the knowledge of this important truth, upon which his own hopes and those of all his posterity must depend, we cannot suppose, that he would suffer it to die with him, but that he would carefully make it known to his children, and transmit it to his descendants as the most precious and valuable discovery, which alone could make them amends for the misery and destruction he had entailed upon them. But whatever care might have been taken to communicate this doctrine, we soon find that it was not duly attended to, nor long remembered. For we read, that when men began to multiply upon the earth, impiety and irreligion kept pace with the increase of mankind, so as to corrupt the sons of God—even those who had received this original principle of a religious faith. There were some however of the race of Seth who preserved their faith and integrity. And among these there is one in particular, who seems to have been a sign given to this sensual and unbelieving generation, for the very purpose of recalling to their

minds the sense of a future state, under the form in which it had been revealed to our first parent. Enoch was translated without passing through the gates of death, in testimony of the efficacy of that faith by which he walked with God. And this translation was an unexceptionable evidence to the unbelievers of those days, that there is a reward in another state for the righteous. And not only so, but it was at the same time a direct proof and a memorial, that the bodies as well as the souls of men are capable of being admitted into the mansions of the blessed; and that it was the purpose of the Almighty, that the entire man, both in body and soul, should be received into those everlasting habitations. Why Enoch was translated alive and not raised from the dead, which may seem to be a proof more directly in point of the thing supposed to be intended, there is an obvious reason: as the great Redeemer was to be the author, so he must of necessity have been the first-fruits of the resurrection to a life immortal.

But convincing and alarming as this wonderful event was, such is the unhappy state of things, that when infidelity and vice give strength to each other, divine revelations of every kind are disregarded. Even the judgments of God, how dreadful soever they may be, will not make any lasting impression upon the hearts of men. For in a few ages after the deluge, there were but a small number that were found faithful among the descendants of Noah. The most illustrious of these was Abraham. And God was pleased to confirm his faith, by giving him a more distinct view of the resurrection to life, than had been given perhaps to any of his progenitors.

God had revealed to Abraham, that *in his seed, all the nations and families of the earth should be blessed*; and that the person, through whom this blessing would be conveyed from him, was his son Isaac. Yet he is commanded to sacrifice this very son of his affections and hopes, while he was a youth, and before he had any offspring; and he readily obeys the command. And a very rational act of obedience it was in one who had frequent intercourses by visions, appearances, and revelations, with the Almighty God; and who had received this very son by an extraordinary instance of the Divine favour,

contrary to his own expectations and belief, and to the usual course of nature. He had therefore grounds sufficient to assure him, that the command was from God, and to induce him to believe, that, if God intended to convey the blessing to mankind through the loins of Isaac, he would most undoubtedly, for this purpose, raise him up from the dead. This was the faith of Abraham, which removed all difficulties and doubts in obeying the command of the Lord of life and death. But there was something more in this matter. In the trial of Abraham's faith, there was, moreover, a strong confirmation of it. The Epistle to the Hebrews (xi. 19.) informs us, that he received his son raised from the dead to life again, *ἐν παρώτρῳ*—a word which Hesychius defines to be *παράγωγων ομοίωσι*, a similitude of facts. And there is in this case such an exact and minute correspondence, in many very remarkable particulars, betwixt the facts, betwixt the transaction relating to Isaac, and what happened to our Saviour, that the former has generally been understood by the Christian church, in all ages, to have been a typical representation of the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ. The only question is, whether Abraham apprehended it to be such? The words spoken by God upon another occasion may not improperly be applied to this: *Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do—seeing that all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?* (Gen. xviii. 17, 18.) And that it was not hid from him, we have the plain declaration of our Saviour himself, when he says, *Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad.* (John, viii. 56.) The day of Christ, or the day of the Lord, in other places of the New Testament, always signifies the day of the general resurrection; but here it denotes that important day, whereon he gained himself the victory over sin and death, and triumphed openly over him that had the power of death, even the old serpent, by his own resurrection. For what other circumstance can we suppose Abraham to have seen in Christ's appearance upon earth, beside his resurrection, that could have filled him, as the original words import, with an exultation and tumult of joy from the expectation of seeing it, and with a more temperate joy, corrected, as we may well suppose, by the preceding prospect

prospect of Christ's humiliation, when he saw it? "Ἐγγυλίσσατο ἰνα ἰδῇ . . . καὶ ἰδῇ, καὶ ἰχάσῃ." Here then we learn, from the obvious sense of our Saviour's words, that when Abraham received his son raised from the dead to life again, in the same typical sense in which he offered him up, the whole transaction was exhibited to him as an explanation of the blessing which was to give life to the whole world.

The same faith in the resurrection of the dead was preserved by pious and good men, and declared by them in the strongest terms at proper intervals of time, when it seems to have wanted a revival. The book of Job is supposed, upon good grounds, to have been written before the law was given by Moses. In this book there is a passage, wherein, if we should suppose Job to have been called upon to have declared his belief in a resurrection (which seems to have been the case), he could not possibly have made use of clearer or stronger terms. They are indeed so very clear and strong, that this, I apprehend, has been a principal reason why some learned men have forced them into another sense; from an imagination, that the very best men of those times could not have had so perfect and adequate a conception, as we there find, of that life and immortality which was to be brought to light by the gospel. This matter will be considered in its proper place. In the mean time, let it be observed, that if Job meant only to declare his persuasion of the recovery of his health and happiness in this life, why does he so often renounce this hope in the most pathetic strains of despair? Why does he cry out, *Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul? which long for death, but it cometh not, and dig for it more than for hid treasures?* Why does he say, *Mine eyes shall no more see good; the eye of him that hath seen me, shall see me no more; mine eyes are upon me, and I am not.* These, and many more of the same kind, are evidently the lamentations of a man, who had no prospect of finding any relief from his miseries on this side the grave. And for this despondency and repining, he is charged by Eliphaz, chap. xv. with want of religious faith; with *having cast off the fear of God; for he believeth not, that he shall return out of darkness.* On the same account he is charged by Bildad, chap. xviii. with *knowing not God.*

These accusations brought from him, in his reply, chap. xix. a confession of his faith, which he introduces with a solemn prayer, that it might be engraved in the rock, and continue for an everlasting memorial to all generations. The sense of this remarkable confession I shall give in a short and strict paraphrase of the text, from the authority of very able and judicious critics. "I know for certainty that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall at last, or in the last day, arise with power over the dust, that dust out of which man was made. Then shall this dilacerated body put on a new cloathing. *Veacher yori nikkepab zôth. Alia erit cutis mea hæc laceratio.*" So the words are read and translated by Michaelis. "And from my own body shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself; with mine own eyes shall I behold him; nor shall I then be a man different from myself." This was the root of the matter found in him—the foundation and support of Job's integrity. And here we have the resurrection of the one identical body, so as to constitute the same individual person, asserted in as clear and strong a manner as language is capable of doing it.

We must not expect to find any thing relating to this subject in those historical books of the Old Testament, which give an account of the civil affairs of the Jews, and the institution and settlement of their commonwealth. Only we must observe, that their whole œconomy, and the great events which happened to them, especially their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, and their settlement in the land of Canaan, were types and figures of better things to come; their ultimate views being thereby directed to that great deliverance and that heavenly Canaan, which had been the object of the faith of all holy men from the beginning of the world.

Under what notion this faith was still retained in the days of David, we may learn from the 16th Psalm, where he makes mention of the resurrection of the body in very express terms. *Thou shalt not leave my soul in hell, i. e. my life in the grave, neither shalt thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption.* The latter part of the words confines this text to the person of Christ, who saw no corruption, which David himself did. But he who had a prophetic view of Christ's resurrection,

cannot be supposed not to have known the design and effects of it, but must have looked upon it as the pledge and assurance of his own. The belief of it is likewise very clearly expressed in the 49th Psalm, which is ushered in by a solemn call for the attention of all mankind, as being the concern of all. The Psalmist first observes, that irreligious men, however great and powerful, had no power to redeem a brother from the grave, "that he should live for ever and not see corruption." They could not pay the price of this redemption. He then tells them, that, notwithstanding their pride and presumption, *they would be laid in the grave like sheep; death should feed upon them, and the righteous, in their turn, should have dominion over them in the morning of their resurrection; for God, saith he, will redeem my soul, or life, from the power of the grave, for he shall receive me.*

In a few descents after David, the Jews in general had well nigh abandoned the faith and hopes of their forefathers. Therefore God was pleased to give them the same sign in Elijah for the same purpose, as had been given to the Antediluvians in Enoch. They received, likewise, about this time, the most explicit declarations of the resurrection from a prophet, who, from the clear view he had of the Messiah's kingdom, and of the great events which were to establish and follow it, has been usually stiled the Evangelical Prophet. I shall only produce two passages from Isaiah, with this previous observation; that the prophecies, which have an apparent reference to some particular circumstances of the Jewish state, are so expressed, as to carry our views to some other more important object, for the sake of which that state was at first erected, and was all along conducted and preserved by a particular providence. And it is most evident, that in many parts of his prophecies, descriptions are given of a future glorious state, which cannot correspond with the state of things in this world, under any of the dispensations of Providence, which have yet appeared, and which hitherto are manifestly incomplete, and preparatory only to that great event which is to be the consummation of all things.

In the 26th chapter of Isaiah, verse 19, are these words: *Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they*

arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust, for thy dew is as the dew of heaven, and the earth shall cast out the dead. And again, at the 21st verse, *The earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.* Suppose these texts to have a relation to the general resurrection, as the Jewish interpreters apply them, and every word is plain and significant: but suppose them to mean no more than the deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrians, or any other deliverance of the Jews, and the expression must appear much to overcharge the sense.

But there is another very remarkable passage in Isaiah, which well deserves our attention. You will find it in the last chapter of his prophecies. He had given, in the 53d chapter, a prophetic description of the sufferings and death of Christ; and had he been to have written an historical account of them after the events, he could not have done it with a greater exactness and precision. He there mentions likewise his coming to life again; *he shall see his seed, and shall prolong his days.* In several of the following chapters, he mentions the creation of new heavens and a new earth, and describes the felicity of them in such expressions as can only suit the future pacific state of the Messiah's kingdom. After this, in the close of his prophecies, he introduces, with a solemnity suitable to their importance, the following words, *as an acclamation from the city, as a voice from the temple, as a voice of the Lord. Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pains came, she was delivered of a man child. Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day; or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children. Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth, saith the Lord? Shall I cause to bring forth, and shut the womb, saith thy God?* Apply this passage to any subsequent deliverances of the Jews—to their return from the Babylonish captivity—or to their recovery from the desolations of Antiochus: or apply it to the great and sudden increase of the Christian church, on the first preaching of the gospel; and what agreement can you find in either case betwixt the prophecy and the events? In the former application, who was the man child that the earth was to bring forth before her general delivery?

livery? How was a nation born at once, and in one day, when those deliverances were the work of time, attended with difficulties, interruptions, and delays, partial and incomplete? How is it, that such a thing was never seen or heard of before, when the deliverance of this very people from their bondage in Egypt was much more miraculous and astonishing? In the latter application, though we read of three thousand being made proselytes to the gospel in one day, yet how small a proportion did the Jewish converts in general bear to the unconverted part of their nation? In the Gentile world, the conversion was slower, and the disproportion greater. In either case, great force must be used to give an improper sense to the words which is not in any proportionate degree reconcileable to facts. But apply them to the resurrection of Christ, and the sudden uninterrupted resurrection of the universal church of God, to which this prophecy is limited, in consequence of it, and every word is pertinent, expressive, and emphatical. This scene, we are told, will be disclosed, when the glory of the Gentiles shall have flown in, and all the Jews shall be brought as an offering to the Lord from all nations; and then it is that our Saviour likewise has told us, *the end shall come* (Matt. xxiv. 14.) when, according to this prophecy, this new-raised seed, and the new heavens, and the new earth, shall appear and remain together. And farther still, what leaves us no room to doubt of the sense of this passage, is our Lord's repeated application of the very words, which Isaiah makes use of to express the vengeance of God upon the ungodly in the end of this prophecy, to the final punishment of them in the day of judgment—*Their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched*. The other part of the prophecy therefore must, by parity of application, relate to the joyful resurrection of the church of God.

Your own reading and observation will suggest to you, that I have omitted many passages in the inspired writings of the Old Testament, which would have thrown light upon the subject before us; having only selected some of the principal testimonies, at different periods, sufficient to confirm the fact which I have endeavoured to establish, that the church of God has, in all ages, embraced the doctrine

of a future state, under the notion of the resurrection of the body.

That the same sentiments continued after these times, we have the evidence of the apocryphal writers. I shall only extract two passages from them, which come up fully to the point. In the second book of Esdras, God is introduced as giving directions to the Jews in several points of their religious conduct; one of which enjoins the pious care of their dead. *Wheresoever thou findest the dead, take them, and bury them, and I will give thee the first place in my resurrection* (verse 23.) And agreeably to this, Judas is said, in the second book of Maccabæus, xii. 43. *to have taken up the bodies of the slain and buried them, in that he was mindful of the resurrection*.

When our blessed Saviour came into world, he found the Jews in possession of the same opinion. None but the Sadducees, who were distinguished more by their rank than by their numbers, had renounced it. And this they did in consequence of their disbelief of any future state at all. For they conceived, as the rest of the Jews did, that the doctrine of a future state implied the doctrine of a resurrection. That this doctrine was received by all other Jews, we have the testimony of St. Paul, in his apology before king Agrippa. *I stand, says he, and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers; unto which promise our Twelve Tribes, the whole body of the Jews, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come*. (Acts, xxvi. 6, 7.) What this promise was, is clearly intimated in the words immediately following: *Why should it be thought a thing incredible, that God should raise the dead?* I may farther observe, that this passage, which mentions the resurrection as a promise made by God unto the fathers, is likewise a support of the general argument of this discourse. And I shall now close the whole evidence produced in this case, with St. Paul's express confirmation of it in another place, viz. the 11th chapter of his Epistle to the Hebrews. He there declares, that the faith of all the pious and good men, who had lived from the beginning of the world, and which had supported many of them in their integrity against all the cruelties and tortures that malicious wickedness could invent, rested upon this principle, "that

they might obtain a better resurrection."

But it may be asked, how is this doctrine consistent with the assertion, *that life and immortality were brought to light by the gospel*, through the resurrection of Christ, and the preaching of his Apostles? I answer, that the expression of being brought to light, according to the true import of the original word *φανζω*, does not mean the first discovery of a thing, but the throwing a clearer and stronger light upon it. The Patriarchs saw, by faith, what was shewn to them at a distance, through prophecies and types, which were to them as lights, directing their eyes to heaven, though shining in a dark place, till the Day-star arose, and diffused a brighter and more general light. The true state of the case is this: in all the ancient notices given of a resurrection, there is likewise an intimation given, that it should be brought to pass by a person who should appear in the world with power, to abolish death and regain his conquests. The whole, indeed, of this wonderful dispensation had not been revealed. That a redemption from the grave, and a great salvation, was to be wrought by the Messiah, for the people of God, was foretold, believed, and expected. But that it had been determined in the fore-knowledge and counsels of God, even before the world began, that an atonement should be made for the sins of the whole world, by the sacrifice of his only-begotten Son, and immortality restored, by the power of his resurrection, to all mankind, this was a mystery kept secret from men and angels, before it was revealed in the accomplishment. The superior knowledge, therefore, gained in this point, by the Christian revelation, lies in this: that we have actually seen the confirmation of the promises given to the fathers by the coming of the great Redeemer himself: that, by having raised himself from the grave, we know that he has the power of the resurrection, and is, as he emphatically styles himself, *the resurrection and the life*; and that, by his resurrection, he has indeed gained and proclaimed the victory over the great enemy of mankind, which was foretold from the beginning of the world, and expected by the church of God through all the ages of it. They looked for immortality through a Redeemer, by promise: we have seen the Redeemer him-

self, and through him have the covenant of immortality actually conveyed to us.

The result of all that has been said, is this: When the Apostles preached Jesus and the resurrection, they preached no novel doctrine. These had been the desire and the expectation of ages. All the pious and good men that ever lived, who retained the religion of their first parent, and looked for the redemption, of which he had received the promise, expected their part in it by means of a Redeemer, who, through the mighty power of God, would raise their bodies again from the dust, to a life incorruptible and immortal. So that, when we profess to believe in the resurrection of the body, we profess the primitive faith of the church of God; and we embrace the doctrine of a future state, under the same notion, that all, who were willing to receive eternal life as the gift of God, ever did embrace it, namely, that of the re-union of the soul and body after death. And, as our Lord's resurrection fulfilled the promises given to the preceding generations, so these promises, recorded in the sacred writings, are a standing confirmation of the evidence of those eye-witnesses upon which the faith and hopes of the succeeding generations were established. They cannot have a stronger support than one which was nearly coeval with the world, has subsisted through all the ages of it, and has all the strength that the concurrence of human and divine testimony can give to any article of faith.

There is yet one more important observation to be made. The gospel informs us, that the resurrection will be general: *that all men shall rise again with their bodies, and shall give account for their own works*. Not only the righteous, of which the true church of God has in all ages consisted, shall be raised to life eternal, but the wicked also *shall go into everlasting punishment*. How greatly, therefore, does it concern us all, so to prepare ourselves against this tremendous day, that we may be able to give our accounts with joy! that when *the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye*, we may be found to have qualified ourselves, both in body and soul, by virtue and holiness, and every Christian grace that can purify and refine our nature, for that glorious transfiguration which

which will make us like unto the angels of God in heaven, and fit us for an admission into the presence of God, where there is the fulness of joy, and pleasure inconceivable, for evermore.

S E R M O N XI.

The Works of Nature full of Intellectual and Moral Instruction.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, at Christ Church, Rogation Sunday, May 16th, 1773.]

MATT. vi. 28.

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow.

THERE is nothing which can fill the mind of man with a more noble and exalted pleasure than the contemplation of the wonderful works of the creation; as there is nothing which can give greater proof of a contracted and abject spirit, than to be daily conversant with, and yet stupidly insensible of, the amazing miracles of nature. The world was not made by a wise and beneficent Creator, that the wonders of it should open themselves to eyes that see not, or display themselves unregarded to its incurious inhabitants. It is indeed principally for the pleasure of him by whom all things exist, that *they are, and were created; who rejoiceth in his works*—in surveying that structure which Omnipotence alone could raise. But they are likewise designed to communicate happiness, not only in the sensual gratification, but in the intellectual and moral improvement of mankind. To the mind that can relish enjoyments superior to those of sense, they will afford the most rational entertainment; and to him that is not barely satisfied with a fruitless admiration of things, they will suggest such reflections as will make him both wiser and better. At the same time that they feast his imagination, they will enlarge his understanding and meliorate his heart.

Whatever part of the creation we cast our eyes upon, we shall find written therein ample lessons of instruction. Would we contemplate and adore the inexpressible greatness and majesty of the Most High, let us look up unto the heavens, which are spread over us like a curtain: they loudly declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work. It openly shew-

eth it even to the rude and illiterate; and the mind, which is improved by science, may for ever expand itself in the immensity of the prospect.—If we descend to this lower world, what a scene discloses itself for rational and religious contemplation? *The earth hangeth*, in Job's expression, *upon nothing*; and by an invisible hand is directed to perform its revolutions, so as to diversify the seasons in their order, and give a regular succession of light and heat to cherish every part of the globe. How beautifully is the surface of it clothed in a green vesture, grateful to the eye, and pouring forth sustenance to man and to the creatures subservient to his use! There is not a single part of it, or a living thing that moveth upon the face of it, from which we may not gather instruction, if we will follow the method of reasoning frequently made use of in holy writ. Various parts of the irrational and inanimate creation are held forth by the wisdom of God, to direct the beings of reason in the way that they should go. The prophet reproves the ingratitude of the rebellious Israelites, by upbraiding them with the dutiful behaviour and fidelity of domestic animals. *The ox*, says he, *knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people will not consider.* And the wise man sends the indolent and slothful to learn industry from the example of an inconsiderable insect; *Go*, says he, *to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise.* Our blessed Saviour descends to a yet lower class in the scale of nature, and frequently sets before us even things inanimate, to convey to us the most important and useful lessons of divine instruction. In his parables he makes use of the lifeless emblems, of seed sown, of a fig-tree, of a grain of mustard seed, to disclose the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. And in my text, and the verses before it, not merely by way of illustration, but as a precept to instruct, and as a motive to persuade, he directs his disciples to look up to the fowls of the air, and observe how they are fed, and to *consider the lilies of the field, how they grow.*

The particular instruction they were to learn from the fowls of the air, to depend upon God for sustenance; and from the lilies of the field, to have a like dependence upon him for raiment, seems

to have been peculiar to the singular circumstances of his disciples. As they were to be engaged in an office which would sequester them altogether from the busy affairs of the world, they were to throw themselves entirely upon the care of Providence, and not to concern themselves about making provision for their support in the usual way, necessary for the rest of mankind. They were *not to provide gold or silver or brass in their purses; nor scrip for their journey; neither two coats; neither shoes nor yet staves.* They were to trust for the supply of all their wants to God's more immediate care, who knew that *the workman was worthy of his meat*, and would not fail to feed and clothe them as providentially as he fed the ravens and clothed the lilies. Our situation and circumstances being very different from theirs, and the application of the command in the text belonging to us no further than as a caution against anxious and immoderate concern for the things of this life, in distrust of God's good providence, I shall consider it in a more enlarged view. And because, at this particular season (being the days of rogation) we are directed to admonish the people to behold the natural produce of the earth in that variety of plants, and grains, and fruits, with which the surface of it is overspread, and to give thanks to God, in beholding them, for their increase and abundance, from whence arises such an ample provision for the sustenance, accommodation, and gratification of man, I shall extend the precept of *considering the lilies of the field, how they grow*, to the consideration of the growth of all those other products of the earth, which are raised from it in the same wonderful manner by the all-bountiful hand of God.

This subject will furnish us with a variety of religious reflections. And, in the first place, it will lead us to admire and adore the infinite power, and wisdom, and goodness of God.

I. There is not a single creature in the universe that is not wonderfully made. All its constituent parts are put together with the most exact symmetry, and the most perfect contrivance. The more minutely and accurately they are examined, the more finished they appear, and disgrace every admired work of the most ingenious human artificer. Every object

that is most familiar to us, every common appearance in nature, is the effect of a miraculous power. The formation and growth of a plant is to us an inexplicable mystery. A blade of corn or a spire of grass is not only beyond the power of man to produce or imitate, but it will defy the researches of the most subtle philosopher to account for or explain the manner of its existence. Who can take upon him to shew, how the several particles of matter, collected from all the various elements, and suited to this particular purpose, arrange themselves, and gradually and imperceptibly unite in that wonderful order, which is necessary for the structure of every plant, according to the laws which the great Author of Nature has prescribed them? Who can survey in this structure of them without amazement, the infinite number of fibres and fine vessels that are discoverable in every plant; the curious disposition of all these; the ways and channels contrived for the reception and distribution of nourishment; the effect this nourishment has, in extending its parts and bringing it to its full growth and expansion; in repairing its annual decays and preserving life? How wonderful is their propagation? With what contrivance and care are their seeds brought up to maturity? And how amazing is their increase for the preservation of every species, that none of the works of God, how perishable soever in their nature, might be blotted out of the creation? And where is the store-house of this infinite variety and number of seeds? Are they laid up for use in the great magazine of water; which Thales thought to be the principle and seminary of all things? If so; of what shape, dimensions, and contrivance are those invisible strainers, peculiar to every distinct species of plants, which admit no other than their own proper seeds for the invariable continuance of all the tribes of them, without the least confusion, as they came originally out of the hands of their Maker; insomuch, that the seed of the smallest herb that creepeth upon the wall, cannot find an entrance into the spacious branches of the cedar of Lebanon? Or does every seed inclose in its little seed-plant another seed, and so on continually, insomuch, that as many trees or plants are contained in it as might be produced

to the end of the world? Impossible as it is for us to represent to our imagination such an inconceivable number and minuteness, yet there is no impossibility in the thing itself; as may evidently appear from this very just observation of an ingenious naturalist; viz. "That those who are accustomed to exercise themselves in natural and mathematical sciences, know that they can seldom go far without meeting something infinite; as if the Author of nature had been pleased to fix the seal of his chief property upon all his works." But to proceed:

As the frame and texture of plants is so admirably well contrived for the reception of proper nourishment, and the conveyance of it to every part, so the manner of their being supplied therewith is no less miraculous. Their roots would neither fix themselves in the earth, nor their fibres branch out, nor their vessels swell, nor their leaves unfold themselves, did not the vapours ascend and form themselves above in clouds, and fall again by condensation, in order to feed the plants below with wholesome dews and showers, which descend in drops as from a watering pot upon a garden. The consideration of this kindly source of the earth's fertility called forth these melodious strains from the sweet singer of Israel;—*Thou visitest the earth and blest it; thou makest it very plenteous. Thou waterest her furrows, thou sendest rain into the little valleys thereof, thou makest it soft with the drops of rain, and blestest the increase of it. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness, and thy clouds drop fatness.*—All these things are wonderful, and they only cease to be so by being obvious and familiar. It is the regular course of what we call nature, that excludes the author and conductor of it from our thoughts; and we are seldom disposed to think upon God till we are awakened and alarmed by something unusual and astonishing. But wisdom will listen to the still voice of nature; and in surveying the works of God, will find out their Maker in all of them. We cannot indeed by searching find out the Almighty to perfection; nor can we in any wise comprehend the amazing mechanism of his works; but by a due contemplation of them, we shall arrive at a knowledge more proper and useful for us: we shall be taught to discern, magnify, and adore

the great Creator, who is mighty beyond imagination in power and in wisdom, whose ways are unsearchable, and whose contrivance is in the formation of the minutest herb past finding out.

And if the wonderful contrivance in the structure of every single plant, will lead us to a pious and holy adoration of the power and wisdom of him that is thus mighty in operation, how shall we worthily magnify and bless the goodness of God, who, with a bountiful hand, has scattered that beautiful and useful variety of them over the face of the whole earth? Whatever can contribute to the service or pleasure of man; whatever is necessary for the comfort as well as the support of life; the earth brings forth in abundance, and pays as a tribute to man, to whom dominion is given over all that is therein. How is the surface of it spread over, "as a table well furnished, with a variety of delicate herbs, fruits, and grains, to nourish our bodies, to please our tastes, to enliven our spirits, and to cure our diseases!" God himself at the creation of them was graciously pleased to declare, that for the use of man, and for his nourishment and support, they were all originally designed. *Behold, says he to Adam, I have given you every herb, bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree in which is the fruit of a tree bearing seed, to you it shall be for meat.* How gracious is the Lord and merciful to be thus mindful of man, whilst he is too often regardless of his benefactor; and who bountifully fills the mouths of those who forget to think of him, and to praise him for his goodness to the children of men. Though he opens the doors of heaven, and rains down plenty upon the earth, though *the clouds drop fatness, and the valleys stand so thick with corn, that they shall laugh and sing,* yet how frequently does the ingratitude of man receive this profusion of goodness, without once reflecting upon the hand that scatters it, or blessing the Author of the increase!

But we have still greater reason to adore the bountiful Creator of all things, in that he has not only commanded the earth largely to supply us with the necessities of life for our comfortable subsistence, but even with a superfluity of delicacies for our delight. How are our senses, those inlets of pleasure, regaled with

with the enjoyment of the kind entertainments nature sets before us! How comfortable and refreshing is the fragrancy of herbs and flowers and spices to the smell! How pleasing is the delicacy of plants and fruits to the organs of taste! And what spectacles of delight do every where present themselves to our eyes, in the cheerful verdure and gay embroidery of the fields! If we consider the lilies how they grow, and reflect, that they put on their beautiful raiment and perfume the air, to gratify our senses, to entertain our fancy, and to multiply our innocent pleasures, surely, some reasonable sentiments should arise, some returns of acknowledgment and gratitude should be paid to our indulgent Creator, who has diversified and embellished the scene for our better entertainment and refreshment in our passage, in our weary pilgrimage through life.

II. But there is another reflection to succeed, which will darken the scene, and cast a shade over the objects we behold. Thankful as we ought to be to God's good providence, for having placed us in a fruitful land, and pleasant habitation, yet we must remember, that the earth is not that paradise which once it was. It has undergone a melancholy change; and we ought never to be unmindful of the cause of it, nor can we sufficiently deprecate it. It was sin, alas! that introduced this deplorable alteration, and at once corrupted man, and deformed the world.—God created man, and placed him in Eden, the garden of delights; where the ground of its own accord satisfied every desire, and supplied him with all the luxuries of nature. Labour was unnecessary to cultivate (except so much of "the sweet garden toil, as made ease more easy"), and art was superfluous to adorn his possessions. The earth was obedient to the commands of God, which prevented his pains; and the same Providence which formed the garden, would have preserved it in its original perfection. It was all his own. The Lord God, to shew his unlimited bounty and goodness to man, had commanded him, saying, *of every tree in the garden thou mayest freely eat*; only as an acknowledgment of the dependence he had upon his Creator, and as a test of his obedience, from tasting of one particular fruit he was debarred; *of the tree*

of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat, for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. But man did eat, and the terrible consequences immediately ensued. *Cursed be the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth unto thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field: in the sweat of thy brows shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground.* This dreadful punishment of Adam's transgression is so deeply rooted in the earth, that it is felt in no small degree, by his wretched posterity to this day. For however ingenious or plausible the opinion may be, which is founded in Lamech's giving the name of Noah to his son (Gen. v. 29.), importing *comfort concerning the work and toil of his hands, because of the ground which the Lord had cursed*, and which supposes, that the curse was actually taken off from the ground in his days, yet it is far from being reconcileable to present appearances. The life of the husbandman contradicts this notion, which is not a life of pleasing exercise and amusement, but of toil and travail. Those whose employment it is to till the ground will tell you, that they rise up early and go late to rest, and daily undergo great pains and weariness to force a subsistence from the earth. It is by the sweat of their brows that we gain our bread; and, after all, how often is their labour vain, and their expectations blatted, by unfruitful seasons and the ungrateful barrenness of the soil! Hence are the cries of thousands for their daily bread, and the land becomes solitary through famine. I cannot upon this occasion omit the observation of a curious foreign writer upon the subject of the products of the earth, viz. "That the earth seems to have preserved its whole strength, nor does its fruitfulness appear by any means to be diminished with respect to its production of thorns and thistles, and an infinite number of other ill weeds; but that it grows weak and lean, and wants reparation and recruit in the produce of corn and those herbs that are necessary for our food and sustenance." How this come to pass, he owns he cannot conceive; nor indeed is it to be accounted for upon any natural principles. Nothing but the original curse of the ground announced a second time unto Cain, in these words, *it shall not henceforth*

forth yield unto thee her strength, could have given us the true solution of this remarkable phenomenon. The use to be made of these reflections is apparent and obvious. They shew the malignant nature of sin, and how odious it is in the sight of God. They ought therefore to fill us with the utmost abhorrence and detestation of it, since it has, by the righteous judgment of God, deformed the face of nature, and introduced all the labour, and toil, and trouble that is in the world. Nay, the consequences of it have been still more pernicious; sin is the parent of diseases and death.

III. This will suggest a third reflection arising from the subject before us. When the life of man is frequently in Scripture compared to a short-lived plant; *when all flesh is said to be grass, and the greenness thereof as the flower of the field*, we readily agree to the comparison, and allow the emblem to be just. The beginning, and progress, and end of human life resemble the origin, and growth, and decay of a plant. We both of us, at first, arose from one common parent—the earth; into which we shall be again resolved; *for dust we are, and to dust shall we return*. If we are not blasted in the bud of life; or if, through the weakness of the frame and constitution, we are not bowed down again to the ground, still as we grow up, we are continually exposed to the storms and tempests that beat upon us and break us down. Or should we be permitted to arrive at our full proportion of strength and height, and escape those diseases which impair our bloom, and those accidents which lie in wait to destroy us, yet in the course of nature, how soon do our organs decay, are the fountains of life dried up, do our honours fall from our heads, and we languish, fade, and die! These reflections, we must be convinced, belong equally to the whole human race. No station, or condition, or age, is out of the reach of the comparison. The great and the mighty fall like other men; nor are they more safe from violence than from natural death; as the tallest tree in the forest is often-times torn up by winds, or shivered by lightning. The decays of age are visible to every eye; nor is the vigour of youth secure against the sudden stroke of noxious and pestilential blasts. A seasonable admonition this to check all

vain and self-flattering thoughts in the young, the gay, and the florid! Let them take in the whole of the comparison, and they will know, that if they resemble the lily in its beautiful raiment and appearance, they resemble it likewise too nearly in duration. In the morning they grow up and flourish, in the evening they wither—how sorrowful are the remembrances, that even long before the evening of life, they are often scorched and die!

IV. The last observation I shall make is this: That as the consideration of the plants and flowers of the field will furnish us with a striking picture of man's mortality, so, on the other hand, it will suggest to him the comfortable assurance of his restoration to another life. When we see the annual returns of cold shut up the passages of life in plants, and deprive them of that supply of juices which caused them to grow up and flourish on the earth; when the grass faileth, and there is no green thing, but every herb shall sicken and die, and every tree become a lifeless trunk; and yet when we behold them all revive at the return of the genial spring; when we see the face of the earth renewed in the same beautiful manner it was, and a new creation, as it were, open upon us; why should there be any physical difficulties in the doctrine of a resurrection? why should it be thought a thing incredible, that God should raise the dead? Is it at all more difficult for him, by an extraordinary act of his almighty power, to collect the scattered particles of dust, and re-unite them in that order, symmetry, and proportion, which is requisite to form the human frame; than it is by a general law (which is only the constant, but no less wonderful, operation of the same power) to recall the distant and divided particles of inactive matter into such a disposition and arrangement, as shall give to a flower the same variegated complexion, and cause it to breathe the same essences it did before? The illustration which St. Paul uses in support of the doctrine of a resurrection, and likewise as an argument to put a stop to all vain and trifling disquisitions concerning the manner how it shall be brought to pass, is taken from a grain of corn, that is buried, dead, and corrupted in the earth, and yet shoots forth into new life, and has life more abundantly. *But some man will say, how*
are

are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come? Thou fool! that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die. As if he had said, "Explain to me, if thou art able, the most common appearance in nature. Tell me, how the seed which thou sowest in the ground, and there moulders and rots, should, from an unknown and imperceptible principle, rise, as it were, again from the grave into new life, multiplied an hundred-fold, without the least deviation from its own form and body? If thou canst not tell me this, why dost thou foolishly inquire concerning the incomprehensible ways of God in giving life to the dead; and why dost thou perplex thyself with impious doubts, in a matter which thy own experience and daily observation will teach thee is not to be conceived or explained?" This illustration of the case had been before made use of by our blessed Saviour himself, in John, xii. 24. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it remaineth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.* Which words, in their application to the resurrection of the dead, have, according to the observation of the religious philosopher, a very curious and remarkable propriety: "Whereas, says he, other seeds rise again out the ground, and become feed-leaves of the plant; that of wheat is almost the only one in nature which dies in the earth; and therefore was the most proper emblem to represent the dissolution of man and his revival."

The proofs of a resurrection stand upon the most solid and immoveable foundations; but arguments, addressed to the ignorance of gainsayers, are very proper and sufficient to silence the petulance of bold and presumptuous inquirers, who dare to call in question the almighty power of God in the restoration of life, and yet cannot but see something analogous to it, and equally incomprehensible, in the most common productions of nature. —Let the false pretender to philosophy distract himself with needless questions, which are far above the reach of the human capacity to resolve. The good and humble Christian can easily satisfy himself, by leaving every inexplicable difficulty to God himself, whose infinite power over the works of his own hands is not to be measured or limited by the

narrow conceptions of vain and aspiring man.

But where natural knowledge fails, that which is religious will still abound. We have enough of the former to answer all the purposes of life, and that is sufficient for us. Nevertheless, we ought to improve ourselves in it by contemplation and study; for though it will be still defective, and leave many things utterly unknown to us, yet the further we advance in it, the greater wonders we shall discover in all the works of God, and shall be led thereby to a more enlarged knowledge and devout adoration of his being and attributes, of his inconceivable power, and wisdom, and goodness.

And as the wisdom of God has thought fit in his holy word to draw variety of religious instructions from the consideration of his works, and frequently sends us to learn our duty from the irrational and inanimate parts of the creation, we ought not to be ashamed to go to the school of nature, and to get understanding from the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field; since they are able to read us wise lectures of morality, and to improve us even in the virtues of a Christian. They will teach us dependence upon Providence, and gratitude to it for our daily support, for the regular supplies of food and raiment. They will teach us a lesson which many of the philosophers could not teach us, that we are not only the constant but the peculiar care of Providence; and that if a sparrow doth not fall to the ground without his notice, how much more will he have a watchful eye over his favourite creature man, and not suffer him to wander unnoticed, unguided, unprotected! They will teach us what all should remember, and all are apt to forget, how frail we are, how precarious our existence is in this world, how momentary our duration. But they will also teach us, that life will rise out of corruption; that we shall spring up with fresh recruits from the grave, like feed buried in the ground; and shall be invested with light in more glorious raiment than the lilies. Such knowledge as this lies open to the way-faring man; it grows in every field, and meets us in all our paths. And it is the most important knowledge that the wisest of men can pursue or gain; it is that which will make us wise unto salvation.

Thoughts and meditations of this kind, though

though they are proper for all men, who have the lively scenes of nature displayed before their eyes, are yet more peculiarly adapted to the situation of those, who not only enjoy the shades and serenity of an academical life, but whose studies are designed and well calculated to enlarge their views of nature, to discover the hand of God in his largest and minuteſt works, and to teach them to magnify and adore him in all the wonders of his creation. This is the employment and delight of the angels themſelves, who ſang hymns of praises when they were firſt brought forth, and muſt for ever rejoice in the contemplation of them, though doubtleſs they are, in many reſpects, too wonderful even for their comprehension. Surely then it muſt be a moſt rational, and pleaſing, and honourable employment for thoſe who have leiſure and opportunity to acquaint themſelves with God in his works; and eſpecially ſuch as were made for the uſe, and convenience, and gratification of man.

It would be ſtupidity, not to know the value of his gifts, and ingratitude, not to apply them with thankfulneſs to the purpoſes for which they were beſtowed. And we ſhould much undervalue them, were we to think, that they were given merely to ſatisfy the animal part of man, and not likewiſe for the much greater advantages of his improvement in his intellectual and moral endowments. They were deſigned to exerciſe, and open, and enlarge his mental faculties; and they will find ample employment for his moſt curious reſearches. But after all, the purſuit of ſcience, that bears no fruit, and tends to no wiſe end, is a vain and uſeleſs toil, and terminates in pride and folly. It is the religious application of knowledge that makes it valuable, and giveth true wiſdom and underſtanding. Could we meaſure the heavens, and tell the number of the ſtars, and call them all by their names, without looking up to their Creator, and magnifying and adoring the immenſity of

his power, and wiſdom, and goodneſs; our knowledge would be worſe, and much more criminal, than ignorance. Or could we ſpeak like Solomon *of every herb, from the cedar which is in Lebanon, unto the hyſſop that ſpringeth out of the wall*; could we recount the names of all their tribes, and diſtinguiſh all their properties; and ſhould we yet overlook the hand and deſign of Providence in their formation, and not direct our contemplation of them to the praise and glory of God, we ſhould only fooliſhly indulge a fruitleſs curioſity, and return empty and unfurniſhed from the ſpacious fields of ſcience.

God is viſible in all his works, and therefore let us glorify him in all. The heavens and the earth, the day and the night, ſummer and winter, the mountains and the valleys, fruitful trees and all cedars, and all green things upon the earth, proclaim his being and providence, do him homage, and praise him, and magnify him for ever. Such is the language of Scripture; but they can only ſupply materials of adoration to intelligent beings, and it is through the mouth of man that their ſongs of praise muſt be conveyed. Let us therefore magnify him with thankſgiving, tell of all his wonderful works, and ſing praises unto him with underſtanding. Let us give utterance to all the works of nature, and we ſhall all ſpeak the ſame language, and join with one voice in this triumphant acclamation, *Great and marvellous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty; in wiſdom haſt thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches! And worthy art thou, O Lord, to receive honour, and glory, and power; for thou haſt created all things for thy glory; and for thy pleaſure they are, and were created!*

Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, be rendered all honour, and glory, and praise, now and for evermore. Amen.

SECTION IX.

FROM THE

SERMONS of RICHARD NEWTON, D. D.
FOUNDER and PRINCIPAL of HERTFORD COLLEGE, OXFORD.

SERMON I.

On Patience.

LUKE, xxi. 19.

In your patience possess ye your souls.

OUR blessed Saviour having, from the 5th verse of this chapter, foretold the destruction of the temple and city of Jerusalem; and from the 12th enumerated to his disciples the several evils they should undergo, before this should come to pass: *as that men should lay hands on them, and persecute them, delivering them up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for his name's sake: that they should be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends, and that some of them should be put to death: he concludes with an assurance, that there should not an hair of their head perish: and with an exhortation to them to possess in the mean time their souls in patience. In your patience possess ye your souls.*

From these words thus spoken by our blessed Saviour, I shall discourse to you concerning the duty of patience under those afflictions to which we are all exposed, and for the bearing of which, when we meet with them, we ought to be so prepared, that how many, and how great soever they be, how suddenly soever they come upon us, and how long soever they stay with us, we may *possess our souls in patience.*

In treating this subject, I shall consider,

I. What Christian patience is, and wherein it consists.

II. I shall endeavour to shew what mo-

tives there are to induce us to the practice of this duty.

III. I shall lay before you some considerations, some rules, by which this virtue, this art of patience, if I may so call it, may be most effectually acquired.

I. Then I am to shew what is meant by patience, and wherein it consists.

Patience, then (as far as it is a duty), I take to be a moderation of grief under afflictions.

To grieve under afflictions, is natural to us, and cannot be avoided by us: but that this grief keep within its due bounds; that it do not break out into excess; that it be not disproportioned to the occasions of it; that it be confined within those rules which reason and religion prescribe; that it be not inordinate either as to its measure or its continuance, is the work of that patience, in which we are required to *possess our souls.*

Sometimes, the loss of what is pleasant, and the fear of what is hurtful to us, affect us with an irregular grief. Our concern on these occasions hath often so strong an influence upon us, as to disturb our reason, and to make us even disregard our religion, rather than not indulge our passion.

Sometimes, the injuries we receive from our neighbour affect us with an immoderate grief, and make us resent them too keenly, and pursue our revenge of them too warmly.

Sometimes, again, the evils we suffer, considered as the allotments of Providence, affect us with an unwarrantable grief, and make us repine against the Almighty, and murmur at that justice which punishes our sins according to their desert; nay, even at that goodness which punishes them much less than they deserve.

And

And since these are the evil effects of immoderate grief, as to ourselves, to our brethren, and to Almighty God, the better to shew you, wherein patience or this moderation of grief consists, I shall explain it according to these three several respects. And,

1. I shall shew, what this moderation of grief is, with reference to ourselves; and what influence it ought to have upon us in the government of our passions; in which respect, patience is the same with what we usually call constancy or Christian fortitude.

2. I shall consider it, with relation to our neighbours; or how we ought to bear the injuries we receive from them. Patience, in this view of it, is the same with Christian meekness.

3. I shall consider it in regard to God; or how we ought to behave ourselves towards him under those afflictions which he is pleased to visit us withal. Patience, in this respect, is the same with Christian resignation.

1. I am to shew, what this moderation of grief is, in reference to ourselves; or what influence it ought to have upon us in the government of our passions. In which respect, patience is the same with what we usually call constancy, or Christian fortitude.

When we define patience to be a moderation of grief under afflictions, we suppose it lawful for us to be sensible of the evils we suffer.

Insensibility under afflictions (of which, as it is very uncommon, and rather affected than real in those who pretend to it, much needs not be said) lies as wide from moderation on the one side, as excess of grief doth on the other. It is not so usual to be too little, as it is to be too much grieved, under the calamities that befall us: but he who is too little, is as far from true patience, because he is as far from moderation, as he who is too much afflicted with the evils under which he labours. Moderation doth not consist in a total unconcernedness about the object we are to shew our moderation in; but in proportioning our concern to the object we are concerned about. So that it is as possible for us to fall short of a due mean as to go beyond it.

Not to be grieved at the calamities which befall ourselves is unnatural, and inconsistent with that self-love which is the

first principle of all our actions, and inseparable from us. Not to be concerned at the calamities which befall other men, is ill-natured, and contrary to that great precept of our Saviour, which enjoins us to love our neighbour as ourselves.

It is as much the duty of a Christian to *weep with them that weep*, as to *rejoice with them that rejoice*. Some there are indeed who tell us, that when the Apostle bids us *weep with them that weep*, he doth not prescribe to us the affection of grief, but the effects of it, as good counsel, assistance, and the like: but certainly he bids us *weep with them that weep*, in the same sense as he bids us to *rejoice with them that rejoice*. If the internal affection is commanded or allowed in the one case, why not in the other? Our Saviour, when he *saw Mary weeping, and the Jews also weeping*, over the grave of Lazarus, *groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and wept*. Here was the internal affection of grief, as well as the outward indication of it. Our Saviour felt that inward pain which he outwardly expressed. He first *groaned in his spirit, and was troubled*, before his sorrow brake forth in tears. This passion of grief had certainly never been lodged within us, if it was never to have been exercised by us. Our Creator had not made us liable to so many occasions of sorrow, if it were unlawful for us, upon any occasion, to be sorrowful. He made us subject to this passion, no doubt, that being grieved at those things which were not good for us, we might endeavour to avoid the things which were thus accompanied with grief; that, being tenderly affected with objects of compassion, we might be forcibly excited to relieve those whom we were thus, by a natural sympathy, obliged to pity; that sorrow might be a punishment for our past sins; and consequently promote our amendment for the time to come; that it should be the effect of our repentance, and therefore the cause of our conversion.

To justify this passion from any imputation of guilt, nothing more needs to be said. Nothing can be said more to the purpose, than what hath been already intimated: that our blessed Saviour, who was free from all sin, having assumed our nature, *was acquainted with grief*; and bearing our iniquities, was emphatically *a man of sorrows*.

Be it therefore supposed, that grief is allowable,

allowable, if kept within its due bounds : and let us now proceed to shew, what those bounds are.

Now, in order to set the proper boundaries to this passion, which is so apt to exceed ; to shew how far a man may be grieved, and yet *possess his soul in patience* ; it is necessary to take notice, that the cause of our grief ought to be warrantable, and that our grief ought to be proportionate to that cause.

Now the warrantable occasion of grief is the loss of some good which we have reason to be pleased with ; or the accession of some evil, which we are with good reason averse to.

Amongst those things, therefore, the loss of which may innocently be deplored by us, and justly affect us with grief, we may reckon the goods of fortune, so far at least as this loss deprives us of the power of doing good ; or of the necessities or comforts of life ; or as it may expose us to the temptation of retrieving them by unlawful means ; or of repairing our fortunes, at the hazard and expence of our precious souls.

We may also be innocently grieved ; we cannot, perhaps with innocence, but be grieved at the loss of friends, as they were linked to us by the ties of nature and blood ; and much more, as they were by their society, their counsels, and their examples, instrumental to our virtue and to our happiness ; as they were agreeable companions, who made our passage through this troublesome world more easy and delightful to us ; and as they were useful guides, who pointed out to us the way, and led us, as it were, by the hand, to those paths that might bring us to everlasting life.

But, above all, national calamities, and those particularly which endanger our religion, ought, in a more especial manner, to affect us with grief. Thus, good old Eli heard the sad news of the death of his sons, and of the defeat of the Israelites, though not without grief, yet without sinking under the weight of it : but when he was told that the ark of God was taken, he fell down backwards, and *his neck brake, and he died*.

To shew what ought to be the precise measure of our grief, in proportion to those several evils which afflict us, would be endless. It may suffice to lay down this general rule, that no concern should

ever be so violent upon any occasion, how just and how great soever, as to take away the use, or hinder the free operations of our reason.

We ought not, therefore, under our afflictions, to suffer ourselves to be transported ; to refuse comfort ; to be industrious to improve our sorrow, and to treasure up heaviness to our souls ; to dwell upon our affliction, and, by a strange unaccountable indulgence of our grief, to pass from one fond uneasy thought to another, till, by a great deal of misplaced diligence, we work ourselves up to an unmanly softness, to an unwarrantable dejection of mind, to a total oppression of spirits.

We ought, on the contrary, to oppose and resist this passion in its first rise ; and to bear up against it when we find it growing upon us ; to be deaf to its demands of our attention ; and to quit the subject that begins to be uneasy, before it comes to be intolerable. So that our sorrow, though it move us, shall not wholly possess us ; though it affect us, shall not overwhelm us ; though *heaviness may endure for a night, but joy*, that joy which arises from the comfort of having set the grievous matter right in our own minds, *shall come in the morning*.

But we shall not discharge this duty of Christian fortitude as we ought, nor *possess our souls in patience*, to the degree required by our great Master, barely by keeping the mastery over our passion of grief, and by the use of our reason so far, as that the anguish of present afflictions doth not transport us ; unless we do moreover so fortify our minds against distant evils, that the prospect of future calamities may not make us swerve from our duty.

For the effect of immoderate grief under afflictions, doth not only shew itself in depriving us of the succours of reason, whilst we are under the pressure of a calamity which at present lies heavy upon us ; but also in tempting us to despair and distrust ; to unsteadiness and wavering in the faith ; to the desertion of that truth, and to the neglect of that duty, which expose us to those evils so unwelcome to human nature.

Now the virtue which alone can prevent these evil effects of our immoderate grief, founded in the terrible apprehension of distant evils, or, in other words, of our weakness

weakness and pusillanimity, is that fortitude which we are now recommending; whereby we resolve well, and are steady to our resolutions; whereby we resist the soft insinuations of sense from within, and the subtle contrivances of a deceitful wicked world from without; by which we are supported, as that neither the frowns of adverse fortune shall be able to terrify us, nor the threats of insulting power force us into a compliance with any thing which we know to be sinful; nor any prospect of danger make us desert that truth, which we acknowledge ourselves bound to maintain.

In the strength of this Christian grace, though the waves of persecution do on all sides beat upon us, we shall stand like a rock unmoved and unshaken.

It was from this noble principle, that St. Paul was enabled to make that brave challenge and declaration, which we read in his Epistle to the Romans; *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come; nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Having thus far endeavoured to shew, wherein patience or moderation of grief consists with respect to ourselves, I shall proceed, in the

Second place, to shew more briefly, what it is in relation to our neighbours, or how we ought to bear the injuries we receive from men; in which sense patience is the same with Christian meekness.

Now it is the proper work of patience, in this view of it, to possess our minds with these considerations: That our sins deserve greater severities, than any which God suffers evil men to inflict upon us. That, if God thinks fit, he can, and will do right to his servants who are oppressed; but that we are not always commissioned to do this right to ourselves. That therefore we are obliged to take care, that the passion of grief, under the injuries we receive, doth not transport us to any unlawful act, or forbidden desire of revenge. That we are not at liberty so much as to curse the Chaldeans and Sabeans, though

they fall upon our oxen and our asses, though they destroy our children and our servants: because the same God, who thinks fit to bring upon us such afflictions, doth also think fit to make use of such instruments to execute his wife, and holy, and righteous purposes. That we are neither proper interpreters of the injuries we receive, nor proper judges of the returns which are to be made to them. That we are too partial to estimate the measures of each with that equity and justice we ought. That we are apt to use a double weight and a double measure, in trying the greatness of those evils which others do to us, and which we do to others. And that vengeance being what we know not how to use aright, we must leave it to him to whom it belongs; and who knows how to dispense it, with the exactest weight and measure. And, lastly, that we are, by the precepts of evangelical meekness, enjoined, not only to be *slow to anger*; not only to be upon our guard that we be not too far transported by it, but even to pray for them who despitefully use us; to bless them that curse us; to do good to them that hate us; and to be so far from being overcome of evil, as to be conquerors in this conflict with wicked and unreasonable men, and to overcome evil with good.

Thus our blessed Saviour, when he had endured all the insolence and derision, all the indignities and affronts, all the outrages and scorn that could possibly be offered to the very worst of men; and was led to suffer a death in its own nature the most painful; in its duration the most lingering; in the opinion of men the most ignominious; in the estimate of the divine law the most accursed; in the midst of his agonies, whilst the sense of them was the most pungent, acute, and afflictive, cried out, *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*

And thus, in imitation of him, that holy martyr, who first trod in those bloody steps, which this leader and Captain of our Salvation had just before marked out for his followers to trace, when he was stoned, *knelt down, and (to shew his earnestness), cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.*

And what the church has made the subject of our prayers, ought also to be the object of our endeavours; that, in all our sufferings here upon earth, for the sake of a good conscience (upon which ac-

count only we can suffer from the hands of men, if we suffer as Christians), we may learn by these examples to bless our persecutors, considering, *that, if when we do well, and suffer for it, we take it patiently; this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were we called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.*

I shall now proceed, in the

The third and last place, to shew what patience or moderation of grief is, when considered with relation to God; or how we ought to demean ourselves towards him, under those afflictions which he is pleased to visit us with; which is the duty of patience taken in the same sense with submission to God's will, or resignation.

And here the criminal effects of immoderate grief occasioned by afflictions, are a proud and irreverent behaviour under the hand of the Almighty; impious and unworthy thoughts of his glorious Majesty; daring and contemptuous reflections upon his wisdom and providence. For though nature will be very apt to plead for the reasonableness of a more than ordinary concern, under more than ordinary pressures; yet, according to the example of our blessed Saviour, even whilst we tremble at the prospect of what we are going to endure; whilst we ardently desire the removal of the bitter cup, we are with him also to pray, that the will of our father, not our own will, be done.

We are to look forward, and to wait for the inheritance of the promises; and taking an impartial view of heavenly and earthly things, are to shew, by a cheerful resignation, that our expectations are not confined to the narrow compass of this world. We are to consider our afflictions not only in themselves, in which regard they may appear frightful and insufferable, but also in their consequences, which may make them appear not only tolerable, but even desirable.

We are to recollect what we have learnt from the word of God, that though *no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness, unto them which are exercised thereby.*

We are to weigh our present sufferings, and our future hopes, in the balance of the sanctuary; and examining them by this true standard, we shall find, that the lightness of the one bears no proportion at all to the weight of the other. *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen or felt, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen, and the pains which are felt, are temporal; but the things which are not seen, and the pleasures which are not yet felt, but which shall hereafter be enjoyed by all those who submit themselves with patience to the chastisements of God, are eternal.*

There is no sin more unworthy of a man, or more unbecoming of a Christian, more contrary to the plain dictates of natural reason, or to the whole tenor and design of supernatural revelation, than murmuring and repining at the dispensations of Providence: and yet this is a vice, not peculiar to the profligate and profane, who blasphemously *set their mouth against the heavens; and whose tongue walketh through the earth;* but is, in some measure, to be found also in men of a better character, who have some awe of God, and some sense of religion upon their minds.

The holy Psalmist, that sweet melodious singer of Israel, was not wholly exempt from this great sin. He himself tells us, *that his feet were almost gone: that his steps had well-nigh slipped. For he was envious at the foolish, when he saw the prosperity of the wicked: insomuch, that he began to repent of his own integrity, and to say, that he had cleansed his heart in vain, and washed his hands in innocency.*

Whilst the smart of present sufferings is keen and afflictive, men are apt to complain that their grief is not thoroughly weighed, or their calamities laid in the balances together. Nay, they have sometimes the confidence to plead their cause with God, and to contend and strive with their Maker, crying out, *that we knew where we might find him. That we might come even to his seat! We would order our cause before him, and fill our mouths with arguments. We would know the words which he would answer us, and understand what he would say unto us.*

Vain mortals ! Do they hope to *strive against him, who giveth not account of any of his matters ? Who hath enjoined him his way ? Or who can say unto him, what dost thou ? Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God ? Shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, why hast thou made me, or why hast thou used me, thus ?* *Hath not the potter, power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour ? Let the potsherd strive with the potsherd of the earth : but who unto him that strivest with his Maker. Is he a man as thou art, that thou shouldest answer him, and come together or contend with him in judgment ? Hast thou an arm like God ? Canst thou thunder with a voice like him ? Shall mortal man be more just than God ? Shall a man be more pure than his Maker ? Is it fit to say to a king, thou art wicked ? And to princes, ye are ungodly ? How much less to him, that accepteth not the person of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor !*

Is it not much more fit to humble ourselves under the sense of God's displeasure ; to acknowledge the justice and the mercy of his chastisements ; to resign ourselves with reverence and submission to the unerring providence of God ; and to say, even when his hand lies heaviest upon us, *Righteous art thou, O Lord, and true and upright are thy judgments ?*

Thus have I attempted to shew, wherein the duty of patience consists ; what its proper work is ; how our conduct is to be regulated by it, with respect to ourselves, to our brethren, and to our God.

I should now proceed in the second place to consider, what motives there are to induce us to the exercise of this virtue ; and then go on to lay down some rules for the attainment of it : but having not time to dispatch these heads, I shall not now enter upon them, but defer them to another opportunity.

S E R M O N II.

On Patience.

LUKE, XXI. 19.

In your patience possess ye your souls.

In speaking to these words of our blessed Saviour (who by his example as well as by his doctrine was the best teacher of patience which the world ever beheld) I proposed to shew,

First, What patience is, and wherein it consists.

Secondly, What motives there are that may induce us to the practice of this duty.

Thirdly, What those rules and methods are by which this virtue, this art of patience, if I may so call it, may be most effectually acquired.

What patience is, wherein it consists, what are the effects of it, how our conduct and demeanour are to be regulated by it, in relation to ourselves, to our brethren, and to our God ; with what constancy and steadiness of mind we ought to bear those calamities which we cannot avoid ; with what meekness we ought to suffer those injuries wherewith we are loaded by men ; with what cheerful resignation of mind we ought to submit ourselves to the chastisements of God, punishing us no more than we deserve, or much less than we deserve, for our sins ; I have already shewn. I proceed now, in the

Second place, to propose those motives that may be most effectual to prevail with us to the exercise of this duty.

The most important motives to patience are to be well assured,

1. That our afflictions are willed or permitted by God to befall us.
2. That they are intended for our good.
3. That they are inevitable.
4. That they are just.

The first motive to patience is to be well assured that all the afflictions we meet with in this world, are willed or permitted by God to befall us.

That the Creator as he has an almighty power to create, so hath he an unlimited liberty of afflicting or relieving, of preserving or destroying, what he has so created : for he created us for himself, and for his own glory ; and however our want of humility under any calamities may make us apt to murmur at the wise providence of God, and to dispute the reasonableness and equity of his proceedings with his creatures, that nevertheless do God what he will, he can do us no wrong ; and that not only from his essential goodness, whereby he is disposed to do good to all his creatures ; not only by reason of his self-sufficiency for his own happiness, whereby he is exempted from any need, or temptation, to do us injury : but moreover, because he hath no manner of obligation

gation to us; and where there is no obligation there can be no injustice.

These considerations often suggested to our thoughts, and duly weighed in our minds, will make us sensible of the irresistible power and undeniable right which God has over all the sons of men, and of that lowest submission which is upon all occasions due from mankind to him.

We shall, therefore, be very careful of our behaviour under those calamities, which God for wise but unsearchable reasons hath thought fit to afflict us with: and shall think it our duty and our interest, with an humble resignation of our own wills, entirely to acquiesce in his: we shall beware of reproaching unbounded mercy with severity, and of charging indefectible holiness with the imputation of hardship and wrong; when we seriously consider that whatsoever we enjoy upon earth is the bountiful gift of Heaven; that from thence we receive *our corn, our wine, and our oil, our fruitful vines, and our olive branches round about our tables.* Upon our parting with any of these, we shall be induced rather to thank the Almighty, who hath permitted us to enjoy them so long; than to repine at his providence, because he suffers us not to enjoy them any longer. If we heartily praised God for the many and signal benefits we receive from him (as we certainly should do, were we fully and constantly persuaded that they did assuredly come from him) we should never reproach him for those, which after long enjoyment we return.

If we sincerely acknowledged, what in words we profess to own, that he lends us whatever we call ours, reserving always the supreme dominion and right of disposing of it to himself, we should never murmur when he called upon us for his own again. Or if we fixed our eyes and thoughts upon the enjoyments he has left us, we should not be impatient for the loss of those which he has deprived us of.

If, therefore, he suffers evil men by fraud or violence to despoil us of our goods; we shall still thank him for our health and strength. If we labour under the infirmities of body, or the weight of years; we shall bless him for the children that support our age: or if he bereaves us of our children, and lets us close their eyes, who by the course of nature should rather have closed ours;

yet if he leaves us good and faithful friends, friends that will testify their affection by their concern for our distress, and their compassion by their assistance of us under it, and will speak comfortable words to us, and bear with our weaknesses, and minister to our relief, we shall still remember his holy name, and magnify him for his great mercies: or if he shall deprive us of these also, and leave us destitute of all worldly comforts, and strip us as naked as we were born; yet so long as we *know that our Redeemer liveth, and can lie down with assurance that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: Though he slay us, yet will we still trust in him.*

A second motive to patience under affliction is, that (not being able to search into the deep and mysterious counsels of God, nor to discover the ends and purposes which our all-wise Creator has in afflicting us, we do not know but they may be for our good; nay, that from the manifestation of his designs, which he in his word has made unto us) we have good reasons to be persuaded that they are always by him intended for, and, by a careful management on our parts, may always be subservient to our good.

There is no man that is born into the world, but is born to suffer more or less; and the sufferings of some men do so much over-balance their enjoyments, that if their hopes were confined to this world, it were better for them not to have been born: but since our expectations reach farther into another world, it is not only our advantage to have been born, but also to suffer: and that,

First, as afflictions are a trial of our faith, whereby we may discover, whether we are indeed most firmly persuaded of those truths, which with our lips we constantly profess to believe.

For he, who steadfastly believes another life after this, and is undoubtedly assured of future happiness upon the performance of his duty, will have his mind so taken up with that comfortable and joyful prospect, that he will leave but little room for those crosses, he meets with here, to make any deep or lasting impression upon him. He that believes there is a reward reserved for the righteous; a bliss more exquisite, more durable, more complete, than any good upon earth; which cannot be taken away, cannot be interrupted, cannot be

much as intermitted; which, contrary to all earthly pleasures, shall be greater in enjoyment or possession than it was in expectation; and which shall always go on to please, and shall satisfy without satiating; must have but a mean notion of, and consequently must be but little affected with, all worldly enjoyments. The possession of these will not elate his spirits, nor the loss thereof sink them immoderately. That good, in which he finds so many excellent qualities, which are not to be found in any thing which this world affords, will much cheapen the value of these earthly blessings; and whilst he is secure of that inestimable reversion, all present evils will appear tolerable to him.

This one single thought is the surest refuge for an afflicted soul to fly unto; and one would think there should be nothing but the doubt of this could make it continue to be afflicted. It is but reflecting upon our future hopes to give us present ease; that what we suffer is but transient; that what we shall be rewarded with will be eternal: for certainly we can never repine at the scanty proportion of pleasure which is measured out to us here, whilst we remember and think of that place, where there is *fulness of joy*.

But because the prospect of a future life can be comfortable to those only who do not doubt of their being happy in it; and because none can have a rational and well-grounded assurance of their being happy in another world, but those who have led a virtuous and godly life here; it will make us more sensible of the benefit of afflictions to reflect upon

A second advantage arising from them, as they do highly promote our virtue.

For a course of life altogether easy and uninterrupted by any misfortunes, is apt to betray us into a dangerous security. To be free from the indispositions of body which others undergo; to be exempt from the losses which our neighbour sustains; not to meet with any of those disappointments which all who are about us meet with; is apt to make us too inconsiderate of the future, and too much taken up with the present; too proud, and too careless; too far presuming upon our own strength, and too little sensible of our dependence. Whereas some seasonable afflictions would put us in mind of our mortality, and should the Almighty stretch

out his hand against us, we should quickly *know ourselves to be but men*.

In this case therefore we are not to look upon the afflictions which God Almighty is pleased to visit us withal, as the result of his wrath, but as the effect of his mercy; and consequently we ought to be so far from repining at them, that we should unfeignedly thank him, that he hath been pleased of his gracious goodness to choose this way of making a sensible impression upon the stubbornness of our hearts, thereby to bring us more effectually to repentance.

A third motive to patience under afflictions, is, that we cannot avoid the calamities which God Almighty is pleased to bring upon us; they are the secret and irresistible determinations of his will; and as we have not wisdom enough to foresee, or to prevent, what is like to befall us; so neither have we power sufficient to remove, or shake off, what we find sits uneasy upon us. It is most advisable therefore to rest satisfied with our condition, however deplorable it may appear, not only because it pleased our Maker to bring us into it, not only because it may probably tend to our advantage, but because we cannot help ourselves.

For whatever we enjoy in this world, however pleasant and useful to us, being not properly our own, because neither is it of our own procuring, or in our own power to dispose of; and the truth of this being verified, by all that ever befell the sons and daughters of affliction; we cannot but be convinced of the extreme folly of impatience, since we must needs know, that *the Lord is King, be the earth never so unquiet*; that our vain, fruitless, impotent strugglings may provoke that almighty power which we are sure never to subdue; that the yoke will not sit more easy upon our necks, by our ineffectual endeavours to shake it off; but that the more fretful we are, the more we shall be galled, and shall increase our burden by not bearing patiently, that which in itself, and with the strength which God would be ready, if asked, to endue us with, would be supportable to us.

In the fourth and last place, it will be another proper inducement to patience, for us to consider, that the afflictions which are brought upon us are just, and what our frequent provocations of the Almighty do highly deserve.

He who reflects how oft he has been guilty of those sins which God detests, and has peremptorily forbidden; how oft he has neglected those duties which God delights in, and has with great earnestness enjoined: he who looks back upon his wilful deliberate commission of the one, and his frequent supine neglect of the other: he who considers how easily he has complied with the least temptations to be wicked, and how obstinately he has resisted the most powerful motions of the spirit of grace disposing him to holiness and virtue: he who compares his numberless bad actions with his few good ones, and finds, upon the comparison, such aggravations in those as render them highly deserving of punishment, and such abatements in these that they rather want to be excused, than merit to be rewarded: he who makes these reflections, which are very obvious and proper to be made, will not only be satisfied, that God is righteous in the judgments he inflicts upon him; but will also acknowledge, that his offences both in their number and in their nature do mightily exceed his afflictions.

And if he carries this consideration a little farther, and calls to mind, how formal and partial his confessions of his sins have been; how insincere his repentance; how unsteady his resolutions of amendment; how weak his endeavours towards a better life; how frequent and scandalous his relapses to his former vicious courses; he will not complain when he is gently afflicted, but will admire that he is not utterly destroyed. *Why then should a living man complain? A man for the punishment of his sins?*

Having thus far considered the most important motives to induce us to be patient under afflictions; I shall proceed to lay down some rules as proper to be observed, in order to the attainment of patience.

The first is, to expect that afflictions will some time or other befall us. We know our state and condition in this world. What we place any part of our happiness in here, is of very uncertain continuance to us. Fortune cannot raise us so high, but envy and malice reach us. Riches, which men so eagerly pursue, *make themselves wings and fly away*. Health, and vigour, and beauty, if for a season they escape the evil ac-

cidents that await them, must suffer a natural decay. Friends are not always faithful, nor children always obedient; and the most faithful and obedient are mortal.

If then in the midst of our prosperity we would entertain these thoughts, and, as it were, anticipate what we conceive would be grievous to us, and make it familiar to our imaginations (not to destroy the sense of providential blessings, but only to regulate our affections about them); the sharpness of every calamity would be so far at least abated, that we should not be surprised into any unmanly or unchristian behaviour under it. Reason and religion would seasonably step in to our assistance, and moderate that grief which human infirmity makes us liable to.

But if (we will not thus fortify ourselves against all these evil impressions, we shall be every moment unhappy. And if) instead of this we will go on to fill our hearts with mirth and to prove them with joy; carelessly to rely upon the present without any thoughts of the future; and value what we possess or hope for, not only above its proper value, but above those things that are inestimable; we must not think that the force of any arguments, or the application of any well-chosen moral reflections, or any apposite references to the highest authority that can be named, even to the oracles of God, will be able to restrain and govern that passion which a disappointment in any of these things will excite in us. Though perhaps when the case was not our own, we could with our words, *have upholden him that was falling, and have strengthened the feeble knees*. But now is it come upon us, and we faint; it touches us, we are troubled.

The mind must therefore be prepared before it be oppressed, and expect the evil day in order to weaken its influence. For no passion when worked up to an excessive height will condescend to hear either what reason or what religion have to offer. And time only then, must work that cure which reason and religion should have done: when a man cannot so properly be said to have exercised his patience as to have forgot his affliction.

As it will very much contribute to our patience, to expect our portion of the evil things of this life before they happen, so will it,

Secondly,

Secondly, to consider of what nature those evil things are which do happen.

As Providence doth frequently for wise and good reasons afflict us, so may we sometimes for no reason at all afflict ourselves. Many accidents befall us which have not that malignity in them which they appear to have. Many that have at first view the appearance of evil, upon further examination are found to be useful to us. And men, through a wrong apprehension, have often been impatient at an event, that hath proved to be the most prosperous that could happen to them.

It will, therefore, become every man that would keep his temper even and undisturbed to consider the nature of what he apprehends to be a calamity, and the circumstances with which it is attended, before he suffers himself to be transported by it; and see in what respect, and in what degree, it is really hurtful to him; as also whether, if in some respects it be hurtful, it may not in others be beneficial; and then also, whether the hurt or the service it is like to do us be the greater. He that is fallen from a high station, may yet be less perplexed and more secure. He who is deprived of the means of charity and beneficence, is sure that God will accept of his will to have performed those duties if he had been able. What value we may seem to lose on account of any blemishes or defects that debase the outward form, we may restore and supply to ourselves by the exercise of those virtues which adorn the mind. And the loss even of those objects of our love who were most dear to us, is of this use, to excite us to the imitation of their excellent qualities for which we loved them, and to reconcile to us the thoughts of leaving this world without reluctance, in order to be with them, without whom we can no longer be easy or happy.

The circumstances also of the calamities that befall us must be considered by us. Is the loss we sustain retrievable, or is it not? If it be not; if we shall never be able to compass our fond wishes, but shall hurt ourselves; *why art thou so heavy, O my soul, and why art thou so disquieted within me?* If it be, it is surely more likely to be so by the exercise of that reason, and judgment, and foresight, and industry, and dexterity, which the cool and calm alone can freely use, than by that transport, that violence of passion which

makes all these faculties useless to us, and so prevents the remedy we seek.

Again, is what we suffer a common, or an uncommon affliction? If the former, let us consider what a multitude of companions we have in our misfortunes; as also how little affected we were used to be with the calamities we now bewail, when it was the lot of others to endure them. If the latter, let us turn our eyes towards those whose wisdom and courage we have admired, and see with what firmness, and constancy, and pious resignation, they have endured as great or greater evils than we suffer, and from thence acknowledge, that it is as much below the dignity of human nature to sink under its afflictions, as it is necessary to its condition to feel them.

Again, many of our afflictions are brought upon us by our enemies, and many we create to ourselves. If we too much regret the calamities which are brought upon us by our enemies, we only make ourselves unhappy to assist them in their designs upon us, and to second that malice at which we repine. If we complain of the sorrows we create to ourselves, we are at once imprudent and unjust. And it would much better become us to make our former miscarriages the ground of our future discretion, and to regulate our unruly and corrupt affections, the true cause of our distress, than lament our distress, the known and confessed effect of them. Let us but regulate our desires, our self-love, our pride, and our envy, and all conditions will be easier to us.

For do we not perceive that in proportion to our desire of obtaining things innocent and warrantable, will be our uneasiness if we do not obtain them; and that if we overvalue what we possess, we shall be tormented with the fear of losing it, and with inconsolableness at the loss of it? And that in things criminal and immoral, the loss of estate, of health, of reputation, of virtue, attend our eager pursuits? And that in things innocent, our desires must be moderated, and in things criminal subdued, unless we will be every moment unhappy?

Do we not perceive that the immoderate love of ourselves is apt to represent our calamities greater than they are, and that, from hence, either to move compassion or excuse impatience, we appeal to mankind for their consent and allowance that what we suffer equally with

others, is still greater when we, than when they suffer it? *behold and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow.*

And again, is it not evident that our pride represents the afflictions that befall us as altogether undeserved? We first arrogate more merit to ourselves than we really have, and then are surprised and ruffled at every event that seems to derogate from it. From hence any misrepresentation of our character, or opposition to our measures, or disappointment in our aims, becomes insupportable to us. Want of deference to our judgments, or of submission to our power; contempt of our person, or neglect of our virtues, makes us peevish and fretful, weary of ourselves, and tasteless of every thing that should be agreeable to us in others.

And, lastly, do we not see how envy compares our own condition with that of our neighbours to our great disadvantage: how another's supposed prosperity afflicts us: how his health compared with our infirmities, his affluence with our poverty, his honour with our disgrace, makes us impatient in that state, which of itself is not intolerable? How reasonable this is will soon appear, if we consider that there are many whom we esteem extremely happy, and who seem not to come into misfortune like other men; who have yet many secret pressures, and perhaps greater than what we endure, which, however hid from us, are sharply felt by themselves. So that sometimes we envy those whom we should pity, and because they have not a dark, gloomy, severe, dejected countenance, are apt to think that all is well, and that there is peace in that breast, when perhaps there is no peace.

But, thirdly, another method of becoming patient under afflictions is a virtuous and religious life.

Neither philosophy nor religion can raise our minds above the sense of pain or grief; and it is not of credit or service to either, to attribute that to them which they do not effect; for it makes men rather doubt of their efficacy, even where they certainly operate very powerfully. Though, therefore, a life of holiness and virtue will not make us insensible of our afflictions, yet the consideration of having led such a life, will be so full of comfort, as in a great measure to lessen the weight and pressure of them. And we

cannot be furnished with better materials to balance the crosses we shall meet with here, than the grateful reflections we shall have, upon the conquests we have gained over the sundry temptations that have assaulted us, and upon the many good deeds we have done.

Prudent œconomists lay up some portion of their worldly substance to support themselves under those evil accidents, which in common life may happen to them; and religious wisdom will prompt us to become rich in good works, that out of such valuable and delightful treasure, we may relieve our afflicted minds in time of need.

To have supported the weak, to have helped the friendless, to have rescued the oppressed, to have instructed the ignorant, to have converted a sinner, to have been any ways instrumental to the happiness and virtue of any of our fellow Christians, will be so many cordials to our drooping spirits in the day of our adversity; and will alleviate at least, what they cannot perfectly cure.

Whereas if the mind is not at ease, every thing else will be uneasy to us. If we are not pleased with ourselves, we shall be dissatisfied with our condition. When a man shall fly for refuge to his own breast, and on seeing all his life past faithfully represented to him, can find no comfort there, all other comforts will be but fallacious and deceitful. The comforter that should relieve his soul is far from him. His conscience is another affliction to him, and that the worst. *A wounded spirit who can bear?*

The last method I shall mention of arriving at such a measure of patience under afflictions as shall be accepted with God, is to supplicate him who only can give it, to endue us with it.

He who orders them, and that for our good, best knows when they shall have answered that end, and when it is proper we should be released from them. When therefore there shall be given us any of these *thorns in the flesh*, any of these *messengers of Satan to buffet us*, *lest we should be exalted above measure*; let us earnestly beseech him that they may depart from us, or at least that his grace may be sufficient for us, that if the embittered cup may not pass away from us except we drink it, his will may be done; that he would sanctify

tify our afflictions to us, and make them produce that sincere repentance, those effectual resolutions of amendment, that exemplary constancy, and that just acknowledgment of his love towards us in thus dealing with us as sons, which he intended by them. Let us humbly entreat him, that the pains we feel may not any way move us to offend him, by murmuring at these his severe dispensations, or by despairing of his goodness in the return of the light of his countenance upon us.

And whilst we acknowledge our sufferings to be a just recompense of our evil deeds; let us beg of him to look upon them as a recompense with which he will be satisfied, that we may, through the mercy and the merits of our Saviour, be exempt from any future punishment for them.

Lastly, let us particularly, and most earnestly, beg of God, that in that extreme and difficult conflict which we must all one time have with the *last enemy that shall be destroyed*, when the *snarcs of death shall compass us round about*, and the *pains of hell get hold upon us*, he would *so strengthen us in the inward man by the power of his might*, as to make us more than conquerors through him that loveth us: that *our souls being escaped, as a bird out of the snare of the fowler*, may take their flight towards the blissful mansions above, and there mixing with that heavenly choir, may joyfully sing this rapturous and triumphant song, *the snare is broken and we are delivered*.

S E R M O N III.

On Integrity.

PROV. x. 9.—Former part.

He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely.

SELF-preservation is a principle universally implanted in human nature, and inseparably united to it. Our own safety and security, our own peace and prosperity, are what ingrosses all our attention. And without doubt, our all-wise and merciful Creator hath endued us with this solicitude and concern for ourselves and our welfare, on purpose that we should avoid what would hurt us, and pursue

what would make us happy. Security from evil, therefore, is what we universally do, and must of necessity desire. But though the desire of security be an excellent first step towards the attainment of it, yet is there no small difficulty in being able to discern where safety is to be found, that we may fly unto it; and where it is that danger lies, that we may timely retire from it. Things do many times appear very different from what in fact they are; and a good deal of caution and circumspection are required that we be not mistaken in the notions we form of them. Sufficient cause there is to doubt, whether that be always to be pursued that invites; and to consider, whether that which is likely to affect us with pleasure this moment will not probably be attended with pain hereafter; and whether momentary satisfaction be not too light to be laid in the balance with lasting uneasiness. And here, I think, we ought with great thankfulness to acknowledge the goodness of God towards us, in that he hath not only implanted in the nature of man such a principle as must of necessity make him desire his own security and happiness, but hath moreover bestowed upon him the light of reason to discern wherein they consist, the power to distinguish between what is fit to be declined as hurtful, or embraced as beneficial to him, to the end that he might not err in his choice when good and evil should be set before him.

But still, though man be endued with this excellent prerogative above all other creatures, that he can deliberate upon, compare, and judge of what passes before him, view it in itself and in its consequences, and prefer one thing to another; yet it must be confessed he is also made subject to very strong passions, which either so cloud and obscure this noble light, that he cannot always clearly discern which of the two things he hath compared is fittest to be chosen by him, or which so overpower his will as to push him on to the choice of that which in his judgment he condemns, so that the bare reasonableness of doing or forbearing to do, is not always sufficient to determine him absolutely either one way or other.

Allowing this to be true, as indeed it is, and that what we would we often do not,

not, and what we would not that we perversely do, there immediately appears the necessity of some standing rule of our actions for us to walk by, that if at any time the reason of things should seem to alter, according as frail men biassed by their passions might be disposed to think they did; they might have recourse to this steady, unvariable, positive rule, compare them with it, and by it conduct themselves safely in their moral ways. And therefore God Almighty, as a further instance of his beneficence to man, lest his passions, to which for wise purposes he is made liable, should either hinder him from consulting his reason or from obeying the dictates of it, hath moreover given him a positive rule to walk by, a written law for his guide. And that a due regard might be paid to this law, he hath annexed eternal rewards and punishments to the observance or neglect of it.

And again, lest what is future and at a distance should not so effectually work upon his hopes and fears, as what is nearer at hand and just before him, God hath also commissioned the civil magistrate to make other laws in aid of his own, and intrusted him with the power of the sword, to the end that such men, as have not the fear of God before their eyes, might be restrained from hurting themselves, and from obstructing their own happiness, by the fear of temporal punishment immediately to be inflicted on them.

And again, lest ignorant or perverse men, left to themselves, should misunderstand or pretend to misunderstand these laws, whether divine or human; and when they did not find it convenient to walk uprightly in conformity to them, should bend them to favour their own iniquity, and wrest them to their destruction; God hath appointed certain interpreters thereof, fallible men indeed, but in a particular manner bred to the knowledge of these laws, and under as strict obligations to explain them faithfully, as others are to obey them sincerely.

Behold the care which God hath taken of man! He hath implanted in him a desire of happiness, that he might endeavour after it. He hath endowed him with an acute discernment, that he might know whether what he desired was worthy his pursuit. He hath fenced him about with

laws for his security, that he might not forfeit the blessings intended him, by making excursions from these bounds, to follow his own vagrant imaginations. He hath also annexed both temporal and eternal sanctions to the violation or observance of these laws; that if by some passions he should be inclined to deviate from the paths of piety and virtue, he might by others be recalled into the right way, and that walking uprightly therein, according to the best knowledge he hath or can get, he might also walk securely.

Uprightness then is a conformity to these laws divine and human.

When I say, that uprightness is a conformity to human laws, I would be understood to mean such human laws as are reasonable, equitable, not against the law of nature, or the law of God. This sure is not unnecessarily premised: since unreasonable laws there have been, and, I suppose, still are in all countries, to which men may be tempted to conform for fear of punishment; at the same time that they may think themselves obliged not to conform in point of conscience. Against such as these the prophet Esaias crieth out, *Wo unto them that call evil good, and good evil.* And again, *Wo unto them that decree unrighteous decrees.* And Tully hath occasionally thought it proper to say, that nothing can be more foolish than to think that every thing is just that is contained in human institutions; since these are often obtained by force or fraud, to effectuate the private schemes of men in power, without any regard to public utility. How many of our own statutes have been mended, which shewed they were imperfect, and how many repealed, which supposes they were inconvenient? and it would be to flatter the Legislature to say, there were none that are bad still remaining unrepealed. I do not then mean that uprightness consists in a conformity to such human laws as these, but in a conformity to such as are reasonable, equitable, not against the law of nature, or the law of God; and even to such as of which we do not see the reason, if therein we see no unreasonableness, iniquity, or contrariety to the law of nature or law of God.

Uprightness, then, is a conformity to the divine and human laws; and I shall endeavour

endeavour to shew that in this moral and legal rectitude consists our security,

1. From shame.
2. From remorse of conscience.
3. From punishment temporal and eternal.

First, In the observance of the laws of God and of our country, consists our security from shame. Men naturally desire to be thought well of in general; and there are particular persons, whom we so love or revere, that we would not forfeit their good opinion of us for any thing this world contains; and others, perhaps, so ill affected to us, that we should be loath to give them occasion to triumph over our weakness; or the pleasure to rejoice at our disgrace.

Reputation is as dear to some men as their lives. Some have not been able to outlive the loss of it. Others have thought no hazards, no labours, no austerities, too great to retrieve it. That men put a very great value upon it, there needs no other proof, than that whoever goes about to lessen it, must do it at his peril. A hurt of this kind will not fail to raise some resentment in the breast of every sufferer. If unmerited, those who have little restraint upon them, from any religious considerations, will be sure, as they see occasion, to retaliate the wrong that hath been done them: and if deserved, the instrument of so painful a sensation will have derived upon himself an enmity to his person, and a vigilance to find him faulty; and perhaps a misrepresentation of him, if innocent. And indeed a good character is of that importance, that not to value it very highly, is to be profligate. And those who pretend not to care what others say of them, are mistaken, if they are serious men. For it is the power of doing good, and of inestimable price. The hopes of it incite to what is laudable, and the attainment of it makes us careful to preserve it, and studious to improve it.

Now shame is the sense of a loss of reputation, of our having done something which we should not have done, and for having done which, men will have a bad opinion of us. And what surer course can we take to avoid this uneasiness of the mind, than by being strict observers of the laws of God and of our country?

With regard to the laws of God, to moral laws, there is a dignity and gracefulness in virtue. To be superior to a

temptation, is greatness, as well as goodness. To subdue inordinate affections, and to bring into captivity every irregular thought to the obedience of the law of God, is a victory that shews more conduct and courage, and ought to be matter of greater triumph, than to conquer armies. In vice there is a meanness, a reproach to our reason, a reflection upon our discretion, an impeachment of that patience, and fortitude, and steady resolution, by which great and good men abstain from whatever is misbecoming or unworthy of them, or will be shameful to them. That vicious men do themselves think vice to be shameful, is evident, in that they choose to practise it secretly; and if they are discovered, yet, to avoid as much of shame as they can, find it necessary to extenuate their faults; and sometimes to prevent discovery, and the shame consequent upon it, are guilty of the greatest crimes that can be committed; and through impatience of other's consciousness of their folly, are sometimes tempted to wish the witnesses of it out of the world, even though there be no apprehension they will divulge it. They are in pain in the company of sober men, having a misgiving of heart that others know what they know amiss of themselves; the true reason of seeking a refuge, and finding a pleasure, in the conversation of those, of whom they know as much ill as they know of themselves. Mutual guilt fears no imputation, it not only doth not accuse, but excuses, and even justifies by such sort of reasonings, as to the parties concerned appear plausible, and of which it is their interest and their comfort not to see the error. Why should one have a great deal, and another nothing, is to them a sufficient argument for the invading the property of any man; forgetting that their own idleness, and lewdness, and intemperance, are the cause that they have no property of their own, or that others are backward to give them what they foresee will not better their condition. There are men, it is said, who boast themselves of their wickedness, and, in their own representation of their immoral achievements, make themselves a great deal worse than they are, from whence it should seem as if they thought, not infamy, but reputation belonged to their evil deeds. But in this there may be a mistake. The praise they solicit is not

to the evil deed, but to the dexterity and address, to the activity and dispatch, to the intrepidity and presence of mind, with which it is committed. For all these qualities, when applied to laudable purposes, are really laudable. But no man sure can think that wickedness is an honour to him. The utmost that can be said is, that modesty, by degrees, may be impaired. That, from an impatience of reproach, they may resolve not to be affected with it. And, after having done violence to themselves in suppressing the sense and feeling of it, may appear as unconcerned for their immoral behaviour as if they were innocent. This, however, hinders not, but that there will for ever be a great deal of difference between the impudence of a prostitute, and the confidence of a clear conscience.

Let us see, in the next place, whether the violation of human laws, reasonable and equitable, be not also matter of shame to every serious man who wishes the peace of societies, or makes a conscience of his duty to God.

That the law-makers do themselves often break the laws: that there is a general remissness in the execution of them: that some in power like it better that men should rather be obnoxious to the laws, than punished by them: that numbers are equally guilty of the same violations; and that some will argue, what is not evil in itself may be innocently done, though forbidden by human laws, the penalty being submitted to upon discovery; are considerations that may lessen the terror of breaking human laws, but not the shame, or at least not the shamefulness.

But, besides that the laws of men are to be obeyed for the sake of God, is there no shame in breaking that law which one hath first agreed and consented should be made a law? Is it not better for one's country that its laws should be strictly observed, than that they should not? And is there no shame in having so little regard to the welfare of one's country, as to break the laws of it one's self, and to shew others the way to do so too? On the other hand, is there no dignity in doing that which is right, if, for no other reason but for this, because it is right? Is there no greater dignity in doing that which is right, the fewer there be that do it? Is there not still greater dignity in doing that which is right, the more one may do

that which is wrong with impunity? Besides, is there no shame in being discovered? Doth not that term suppose one is found doing what one should not do? Doth it not also suppose one is doing it in a covert way, and in a clandestine manner? And is it worthy a man of honour and virtue to do any thing which he is afraid should be known; that he should blush to be surpris'd in, that he should be troubled to hear of? If it be not right, why does he attempt it? If it be right, why is he afraid to appear in it? Does not the being surpris'd in a thing one should not do, confound a man that hath any modesty? Does he know which way to look, or what to say?

There are some, indeed, who, sensible enough of shame, in departing from certain frivolous rules of honour of their own making, live in the utter contempt of the laws of God and man shameless: and not only so, but arrogate also a sort of reputation to their immoral and unlawful actions, and often make themselves a great deal worse than they are, purely for the magnanimity they think there is in being above restraint. But let them not be mistaken. Shame doth not less attend them, because they have learnt to glory in it. The end and design of laws is to curb the vicious and irregular appetites of men. And where is the reputation of owning they are so much more vicious and irregular than other people, that the laws themselves are not able to restrain them?

With regard to many laws purely political, there are also multitudes who professedly live, and allow themselves in the breach of them? Conceiving, perhaps, that what is not evil in itself is therefore innocent; that their numbers will keep them in countenance, and protect them from shame; and that there can be no great harm in the violation of these laws, so long as they are ready to submit to the penalty of them, if they be discovered.

And however ready they may be to submit to the penalty of the laws they violate, yet is there no shame in penalty? Have rewards and penalties lost their nature, or if praise attends the one, doth not disgrace adhere to the other?

There is, therefore, no security from shame but in uprightness, but in a strict conformity to the divine and human laws. The hypocrite well knows the value of
this

this virtue, and how much it concerns his worldly interest that men should have a good opinion of his integrity. And therefore, though he is not upright, yet he pretends to be so. But as this in him is dissimulation, and not virtue, so the event is generally the same to him and to other wicked men. He cannot always be upon his guard. There are times when the exact observer will see through, or at least have reason to suspect, that artful behaviour, by which he would steal away the reputation which only belongs to upright men. And the world is generally so ill-natured, that whomever they suspect, they defame.

But what disgrace can ever attend the man who does his duty? Who, considering his own imbecility, thinks it a privilege to be under the restraint of wholesome rules, and his greatest honour to obey them? Wrapped in his own virtue, envy and malice cannot hurt him. The love and esteem of all good men are engaged to protect and defend him.

But were it possible for men to wear this disguise without suspicion, and to sin so privately that they should not be found out, and that shame should not always be the consequence of evil deeds; yet let them not hereby think themselves secure so long as they shall be subject,

2. To remorse of conscience.

Peace of mind is the greatest blessing man can have, and that alone which gives a relish to all other enjoyments. This is what we aim at in all our pursuits, and if we can be so happy as to arrive at it, 'tis an ample recompense of all our labours. Neither riches, nor honours, nor preferments, nor popular applause, nor great men's favour, can bestow it. The only source from whence it springs is a man's own breast, which, kept clean and unpoluted, will be an inexhaustible fountain of the most refreshing waters. Nothing but uprightness can secure to us this peace of mind, this lovely tranquillity. *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.* For every man, who is conscious to himself of evil deeds, carries about with him his own accuser, his own tormentor: before he has committed the premeditated crime, his thoughts are so taken up with the prospect of some present pleasure or advantage resulting from it, that he sees not the dreadful consequences that will attend it; but, after the evil action is once

done, and cannot, if he would give ten thousand worlds, be undone; when the guilt that seemed little before it was incurred, is now enhanced, and the satisfaction or benefit that was before proposed, is now diminished; then it is, that innumerable uneasy thoughts are apt to crowd upon him in a tumultuous manner; then it is, that he feels the insufferable pain and anguish of a wounded spirit. What refuge does he hope for in retirement; whilst the fatal arrow sticks fast in his side, and the mind is at leisure to lay before him a faithful representation of what he dreads to behold? And when, for ease, he would change his solitude for society; then it is, that, in the midst of his amusements and diversions, the remembrance of guilt obtrudes itself upon him, and damps the jollity of all his entertainments. Then it is, that he must be forced to hear the like crimes he is guilty of condemned in others, and apply the same censures to himself which are due to them, with an aching heart. What sort of security is this, to walk dishonestly in by-paths and crooked ways unseen of men, if we ourselves disapprove the irregular steps we take, and for ever lament, that we would retreat, and cannot? What avails it any man to have hid his theft, his murder, his adultery, his perjury from men? The all-seeing eye hath discovered him, and the Almighty, with a stretched out arm, pursues him.

But it may be, there are some so accustomed to do evil, of so lost a reputation, and of so seared a conscience, that they are insensible of shame, incapable of remorse; and who, if these were all the dismal consequences of doing evil, find no discouragement from hence. If the violations of the laws of God and man were attended with no other dangers than infamy, and after reflections full of horror, they are as secure from any apprehensions of these as uprightness itself can make them. But God be thanked, these shameless hardened wretches are still of the same weak frame and make with other men, are still as sensible of external pain, fear punishment, and fear death still like other men: and the less they believe of another world, the more unwilling they are to be hurried out of this: which brings me to observe,

3. That their fancied security in the two former respects, will but more effectually

ually expose them to those dangers which they do, and must fear, and from which the upright man alone can possibly be secure, viz. of temporal and eternal punishment. The prospect of some present pleasure or profit is the great temptation to wicked men to sin, which would be of little consideration to them, if they were thoroughly acquainted with virtue, *whose ways are ways of pleasantness, and all whose paths are peace*; and which, as it is, would hardly be a temptation great enough to overcome them, if they were not buoyed up with the hopes of impunity.

But let not the wicked man flatter himself that he shall go unpunished, either in this world, or in the world to come. His designs may be deeply laid; his schemes may be cunningly contrived; his outward behaviour may be so plausible as not to be suspected: he may have succeeded in his dark practices so often without discovery, as to be confirmed in his opinion, *that he shall never be found out*; he may have blamed the misconduct of others who have miscarried in their wicked enterprizes, and fancy that he himself, in the same cases, could have used greater dexterity, and that however they were taken in the crafty wiliness that they had imagined, yet he could have escaped.

But, after all, he cannot be more wary to attempt a villany, than others will be watchful to discover him. The laws were made for the security of the community, and the breaker of them is a common enemy. To hurt one man, is to alarm the neighbourhood: and every man that regards his own safety, will in this respect be concerned for that of others; and will think it his interest to pursue the invader of it, and bring him to justice, both that he may be freed from any future apprehension of injuries from him, and that others, being terrified by the example of his punishment, may be afraid to offend.

It is very rare that any notable crime hath escaped being brought to light; and the numbers yearly convicted and condemned to the punishments they deserved, might convince any man, that was not too fond of his own parts, that running the same hazards, he would not be likely to be more fortunate. No man that does evil is ever secure, however secret. He may look about to see who seeth, but he

is not sure he is not seen. If the darkness of the night invite, the silence of it often betrays. If the villain goes alone, there is usually a misgiving of heart and fearfulness to attempt; there is usually a slowness to dispatch what was intended, and a disorder in his own scheme, and an invitation of resistance, all which tend to discovery. In the confidence of an accomplice, there is no better security. What his fidelity would hide, his inadvertence may disclose. What the present friendship conceals, future disagreements may lay open. Who is safe from the weakness, or folly, or passion of a frail criminal? What wicked man is above the temptation that may be offered for a wanted discovery? What taciturnity is to be expected in the decay of parts, or loss of senses, which in the course of life may happen to any man? What sagacity can foresee all the questions that may be put to suspected persons? or be able to evade the force of them, or to contrive a defence so connected, so uniform, so agreeing in all its parts, as that the audience shall not fail to pity the falsely accused, and retire under a full persuasion of their innocence? Or what, if a wicked partner should repent, and not being able to make restitution for the wrongs he hath done, should, under the terrors of his conscience, think himself obliged, in his last moments, when he is launching out into eternity, to confess his crimes, and fearing no other reproach like that of his own heart, to declare who it was that betrayed him into them, or assisted him in them?

But if men of this bad character are usually so hardened, that nothing of this needeth to be feared (though this in fact hath often happened), yet who is always so wary and circumspect in doing ill, and after he hath done it, that he can be sure he shall not betray himself? There is a hurry and a confusion that attends guilt, in the midst of which those very things are often done to cover, which effectually expose the wicked person. God Almighty will infatuate him, that he may destroy himself. *He is afraid where no fear is. He fleeth when no man pursueth*; and, as it were, offers himself up to the punishment he seeks to escape.

But, alas! what are temporal punishments compared with eternal! If those are to be dreaded because they are more immediate; these are justly terrible,

rible, in that they are more exquisite and more lasting. Therefore let not *the heart of man be set in him to do evil, because sentence is not executed speedily against him.* Nor let him flatter himself that this is at so great a distance. How short is the longest life compared with eternity! It is even as nothing. At best it is but a span long; and God Almighty, incensed at the disobedience of men, may be provoked to cut it shorter than they are aware of. When a man is descending to the grave, and must enter into an eternal state of happiness or misery, according as he hath obeyed or disobeyed the laws of his Maker, what are all *the pleasures of sin which he hath enjoyed for a season?* What security is it to him to have been able to evade the examinations of an earthly magistrate, and to have escaped the punishment assigned to the breach of human laws? The damnation that he hath been so often warned of, and which seemed at a distance, now lingereth not, and the just vengeance of God is ready to overtake him. In vain doth he call to the hills to hide him, and to the rocks to cover him, for *all things are naked and opened to the all-seeing eyes of the supreme Judge with whom he now hath to do.* Nor hath there been any thing heretofore so secret, which shall not now be made manifest. Now the upright and the wicked shall hear their respective dooms pronounced. *Come, ye blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you. Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.*

I hope by the above reflections it hath appeared, that there is no security from shame, or remorse of conscience, or present or future punishment, but in uprightness, or a conduct agreeable to the laws of God and of our country. But before I conclude this discourse, I beg leave to observe, that as there is an uprightness required in keeping, so there is in explaining, these laws; and that security in all the fore-mentioned respects will belong, as to the upright observer only, so only, to the upright interpreter of them.

The gross of mankind can neither be their own counsellors in matters of human law without prejudice to their temporal interests: nor their own casuists in matters of divine law without hazard to their spiritual: nor at any time competent judges in their own case.

Hence arises a necessity that some men should apply themselves in a particular manner to the study of these laws, and to get therein such knowledge as may enable them to advise those who shall consult them, what may be done with safety in points of law, or conscience.

To invite applications to them for their advice, they profess themselves ready and able to give it. The higher are their stations, and the greater their reputation for skill in their several professions, the greater is the authority and influence of their opinions and doctrines.

If they mislead, how many do they mislead? And if those who are misled are men of power, how fatal, how extensive may be the mischief of the error?

Histories will sufficiently inform us, that illegalities warranted to be law, and indefensible tenets pressed upon the conscience for gospel, by their respective great professors, have subverted kingdoms.

But what could be a sufficient motive? Naturally, if there be no bias upon the mind, men choose to say that which they really think, and it is with reluctance that they ever bring themselves to say otherwise. No other motive hath appeared, than to gratify the mean appetite, which they could not forego, to a greater fortune, or a higher station, by pleasing men, who could enrich them, and advance them.

But *do they seek to please men? If they yet seek to please men, they will not be the servants of Christ.*

And if in these cases they cannot be said to walk uprightly, neither will they be found to walk securely. Their high character will not screen them from reproach, but rather expose them to it. Or if others should acquit them, they would yet condemn themselves. Moreover, it is required both of the dispensers of the laws of the realm, and of *the stewards of the mysteries of God, that men be found faithful; and, if they be not, He that is higher than the highest, regardeth; and there be higher than they.*

Away, then, with all these temptations which do so easily beset unsteady, covetous, and ambitious men. Away with this childish fondness for outward pomp and splendour, for corruptible riches, for deceitful favour. Our education here, and
our

our experience every where, will teach us the emptiness and vanity of these trifles. To a man who daily considers his mortality, and that he is going to *the land where all things are forgotten*, what are the greatest earthly advantages which the greatest prince hath to bestow, compared with the satisfaction of his own conscience here, and *the glory which shall be revealed in him hereafter*? Then, *let not our heart reproach us so long as we live*. Let us keep our integrity, though we die. Uprightness is the greatest ornament of the greatest men of all professions. It conciliates trust and confidence, affection and friendship; for it is the greatest security can be given to men, that we will not injure them, nor deceive them. There is no fortune so low, nor aspect so mean, to which it doth not add a value and a beauty. The person adorned with it may possess his superiority without envy, and his frailty without censure. It disarms the malevolent of his malice, and the punished of his resentment. It gives a serenity in solitude, a cheerfulness in society, a pleasure in devotion, a consolation in misery, and, at the approach of death, hopes full of immortality.

S E R M O N IV.

On Public Worship.

PSALM xxvi. 8.

Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine Honour dwelleth.

To worship God and to find a pleasure in doing so, is to arrive at the highest pitch of happiness that man is capable of enjoying upon earth.

He who is the author of our being, who *holdeth our soul in life*, who *giveth us all things richly to enjoy*, who *heareth the supplications of his servants*, and *when he heareth doth forgive*, hath a right to our devotion, and makes our piety to him an indispensable duty in us. That that which is our duty may also be our delight, how earnestly ought it to be desired!

No less than eternal life is proposed as the reward of our service; and if, in the mean time, we can bring ourselves so to love this service, as to think it perfect

freedom, how will it invite us to engage in it! how must it please us when we are so employed!

The great difficulty of our Christian course, is so to conduct ourselves amidst the pleasures of this world as not to be drawn aside from the paths of virtue and religion in pursuit of them; and if once we can be so blessed of God, as to find a pleasure in dedicating ourselves to him and to his service, superior to that of any earthly enjoyment, it will be to anticipate our future bliss, and in the present state, to have a foretaste of the joys of heaven.

Sensual pleasures, which we so eagerly pursue for the gratification of the present appetite we have to them, if forbid, are enjoyed with remorse, and, if allowed, perish in the enjoyment: but, if once we can arrive to take a pleasure in devotion, if once we can be so influenced, O God! by thy holy spirit, as to *love the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine Honour dwelleth*; how sincere, how lasting will our satisfaction be? How will the thoughts of loving thee, and being beloved by thee, complete every other joy, and be a present help in every trouble? Whoever shall be so happy as to have reason to think this his case, will find *nothing upon earth he can desire in comparison of thee*; will regret the loss of every opportunity to wait upon thee; will think *one day in thy courts better than a thousand*.

If this be so, it cannot but be a very proper inquiry, how this love of God's house, how this pleasure in devotion, is to be attained.

The only means to beget in us this love, to make us capable of this exalted pleasure, is innocence of life. *I will wash my hands in innocency* (says the holy psalmist), *and so will I go to thine altar*. And then it follows, almost in the next words, *Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine Honour dwelleth*.

Innocency of life will prepare us to take a pleasure in devotion, from the consideration,

I. Of those sins of infirmity which, in that state, we are still liable to, and earnestly desire may be forgiven us.

II. Of those mercies which we want to receive, and hope will be bestowed upon us.

III. Of

III. Of those benefits which we have already received, and for which it cannot but be agreeable to us to return our thanks.

Innocency of life will prepare us to take a pleasure in devotion,

First, From the consideration of those sins of infirmity which, in that state, we are still liable to, and earnestly desire may be forgiven us.

The innocent person is he who sincerely endeavours to obey the whole will of God, and to make himself as perfect as his frail nature will permit him to be.

The greatest sinner, who sincerely repents, becomes, in the sight of God, an innocent person; and the innocent person submitting involuntarily to moral weaknesses and infirmities, doth not, in the sight of God, who knows whereof he is made, forfeit his innocence.

But still, these infirmities, though they are not heinous in their nature, being such as the best Christians will be often liable to; nor wilful in the commission of them, being such as have escaped the strict guard he hath always had over himself against them; yet, being all departures from the rule of duty, which he endeavours punctually to perform; and defects of that perfection which he ought always to aim at and pursue; and, in a certain degree, offensive to God, who is of purer eyes than to behold any iniquity, they become matter of humiliation and repentance, make him sensible of his own weakness and insufficiency to do any thing good of himself, and point out to him the necessity of his dependance upon God, both for the forgiveness of these instances of his frailty, and for the divine assistance of his sincere endeavours after greater perfection, for the time to come.

The innocent person, therefore, in all his deviations from the paths of virtue, hath a load upon him which he wants to be eased of. The having condemned them, in a transient thought, when first he took notice of them as irregular and sinful, contents him not. The returns of the solemn times of devotion are acceptable to him. He waits for them with impatience. *Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks; so longeth his soul after thee, O God. He seeks thee early where thou mayest be found.* He prostrates himself before thee. He confesses his sins unto

thee which he, in thought, word, or deed, hath committed since he last had the happiness to approach thee. He knows he is sincere, and is assured he shall be forgiven. *His heart condemns him not, and therefore hath he confidence towards God.* He rises from his knees refreshed and comforted. He considers himself as a new man. He neither hates, nor envies, nor meditates revenge, but all is quiet and calm within his breast. He hath a clear conscience with respect to all that is past, and a firm resolution to endeavour to keep it so for the time to come. The account is made up between God and his soul. He hath done all that his frail nature will permit; and consequently all that is demanded towards his acceptance as a good and faithful servant; and should his soul be required of him this very night, this very moment, he hath no misgivings of heart, but that he shall enter into the joy of his Lord.

How is he pleased when he retires from his devotions, to think that he hath been doing his duty; that he hath concurred with the influences of the Holy Spirit towards the making himself a better man; that he hath not grieved his angel whom God hath assigned him for his guardian; that joy shall be in heaven over him, whether he be a sinner that repenteth, or one of those, who, in the language of our Saviour, need no repentance; that he is in the favour of the Almighty, and may depend upon his protection; that, if he hath neither the parts, nor the learning, nor the beauty, nor the health, nor the fortune, nor the interest, which are the lot of others, yet he hath God for his friend; and that no man living is of any more real value than he is of in the sight of God? With what cheerfulness doth he busy himself all the day after in some proper employment, by which he may glorify his Maker, and be useful to his fellow-creatures? And how sincere are all the pleasures which he innocently enjoys, whilst they receive no abatement from any anxious thoughts of neglected duty intermixing with them? And when he recollects the errors of the day, and sees what he hath thought, or said, or done amiss, led thereto by human passions, how doth he again desire the time of the evening sacrifice, that he may again make his peace with God, through the

merits of the unfinning obedience of his spotless Redeemer?

If then, O Lord! thy house be a place of rest to the sincere mind of the innocent supplicant; if his approach thither be acceptable to thee whom he chiefly desires to please; if there he meets with thy never-failing compassions to those infirmities which he himself deplores; if there he is loosed from the bands of his sins, and receives the forgiveness which he asks; if there he obtains that peace of conscience which will make him easy in this life, and give him hopes of a better, how is it possible for him not to *love the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine Honour dwelleth?*

But what pleasure hath the impenitent person in a bare attendance at the house of God? how late doth he always, either through negligence, or on set purpose, come to it? how tedious doth he think his confinement? how insupportable is all that is doing there? how doth he long to be released from so painful a task? how busy is his eye in reaching in variety of matter to divert him? how often doth he shift his posture without being easy in any? or, to prevent his being restless, how doth he get into a train of idle thoughts wholly foreign to the present business, without perceiving how unseemly he laughs or frowns as his thoughts please or displease him, in order to wear away the time insensibly which, otherwise, cannot fail of being burthenfome to him?

But if he doth not barely attend, but presumes likewise to mix in the common service, conscious as he is of his own insincerity, where is the pleasure of a solemn mockery? of offering the *sacrifice of a fool*? of sinning where he should repent? and of *treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath*, in the very place where he should be imploring mercy?

For the impenitent person to attend at the house of God out of custom, and with design to keep up a tolerable reputation in the world, is possible; but to desire to do this, and to take a pleasure in doing it, is impossible.

But, secondly, innocency of life will prepare us to take a pleasure in devotion from the consideration of those mercies which we want to receive, and hope will be bestowed upon us.

In our passage through this troublesome world, some things we cannot but desire,

as necessary to our subsistence, and some we may very lawfully ask, as conducive to our happiness. *Every good and perfect gift, we know, cometh from above.* Our being is from God, and so is the support of it. And it cannot but be a great pleasure to the innocent to consider, that *their heavenly Father knoweth that they have need of all these things*: and that since they have *first sought the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all these things will be added unto them.*

The innocent may ask indeed for that, as good, which is not so, and be denied. But it is no less a pleasure to them who always ask with submission to the will of God, to think that they shall be denied what is not fit for them to have, than it is to be assured, that *no good thing shall be withhold from them that live a godly life.*

The innocent believe they shall receive a reward of their virtues, because God hath promised they shall do so; and, upon the same grounds, do they look for the efficacy of their prayers. Having first lived after such a manner as that they may reasonably hope they are in the favour of God; they are verily persuaded, that *whatever they shall ask in prayer, believing, they shall either in kind, or in value, most certainly receive.* And if so, in proportion to the concern they have to succeed, will be the pleasure of those devotions which they hope will prevail.

To ask, is to consider God as the giver of all good things to his creatures, and his creatures as dependants upon him for whatever they do, or can enjoy. Our asking, under these considerations, fits us for his favour, and is that sort of desert towards him which he expects from us, and will be pleased with. Now, the innocent cannot but have an extreme delight in doing what they know will be acceptable to God, as well as in aiming to procure what they conceive will be beneficial to themselves.

Innocence gives the devout an openness, and a freedom in their access to the *mercy-seat*. There is a confidence in the mind of the innocent, that their approach will be acceptable. They consider that they are invited and encouraged by the *Father of mercies* to address themselves unto him. *Ask and ye shall have. Ye have not, because ye ask not.* And that their drawing near to him will not be interpreted as bold

bold intrusion into his presence, so long as they are conscious to themselves that their heart is not far from him. No, their soul is athirst for God, yea even for the living God. They are desirous to come, and to appear before the presence of God.

Besides, the innocent person hath a larger and more extensive view than that of his own interest; and desires that all mankind may be as innocent and as happy as himself. And if so, what a pleasure is it to him to think, that possibly the peace and prosperity of his country may, in some measure, be owing to his devotions? what a delight is it to him to reflect, that many a sinner, at his instance, may be permitted to see the error of his ways; and, through his pious importunity with God for him, may be converted and live? or, hath he a friend in distress, who is as dear to him as his own soul, how must he desire that God would have mercy upon him? and how will he be filled with joy, if he may, with reason, presume, that God will be entreated for him?

But, what inducement have the impatient to love the house of God from these considerations? For, if they attribute their temporal felicity to their own art and contrivance; or to mere fortune and chance; what pleasure is it to ask the Almighty for those benefits which they think they can bestow upon themselves; or, which will be given, or withheld, as it shall happen, whether they will or no? or, if they allow all things to be under the direction of Providence; what hope is there of obtaining those mercies at the hand of God, to which they have forfeited their title? *The friendship they have contracted with the world, is enmity with God.* For them to ask any thing of the Divine Majesty they have offended, without first having begged of him to be reconciled to them, is to insult, and not to petition; and the prayer they shall offer, will, at once, be fruitless, and provoke. *Are ye come to inquire of me? As I live, saith the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you.*

And though the ungodly do sometimes prosper in the world, yet is there a great deal of difference between what is given by God to some as a blessing, and permitted to others as a temptation and a snare. In this respect,

a small thing which the righteous hath, is better than great riches of the ungodly. Let not, therefore, this thought interrupt the pleasure which he finds in supplicating God for his mercies; for, if he will give himself time to consider, and to understand the end of these men, namely how they are set in slippery places, and cast down and destroyed, he will have no reason to repent that he hath washed his hands in innocency, nor to think that he hath cleansed his heart in vain.

But, thirdly, innocency of life will prepare us to take a pleasure in devotion, from the consideration of those benefits which we have already received, and for which it cannot but be agreeable to us to return our thanks.

Benefits are an argument of the benevolent mind of the donor towards the person on whom he confers them. They shew that he is disposed to do him good, and to make him happy; they shew that he loves him, and would endear himself to him. And the receiver who makes these reflections cannot but desire to express his gratitude.

If the benefits bestowed upon him be very large, and very many; if they are such as he extremely wants; such as could not have come to him from another hand; and such as he hath no way deserved; what pleasure will arise in his mind to think that he is of so much value in the sight of his benefactor, as to be made the object of so great a love, of so tender a concern! And how will he rejoice at every opportunity to do what he conceives will be acceptable to him?

But, further, if the condition of the donor be such that he needs not any thing that can be given him in return; nor doth expect, nor will receive, any thing but the tribute of a thankful heart; and the condition of the receiver be such that he hath nothing else to give him but his thanks; is it to be imagined that it should not be the greatest pleasure of his life to pay him them, and most gratefully to express an admiration of his goodness, a zeal for his honour, a love for him, and for all those who sincerely love him?

This is the very case between God and his creatures. He is our mighty Benefactor. *In him we live, and move, and have our being. He openeth his hand, and we are filled with good.* He hath opened to us a prospect of eternal bliss.

He hath made the condition of our happiness hereafter nothing more than the observance of a rule which will make us happy here. And, lest any of us should fall short of it, he perpetually afflicts us with his holy spirit to obey sincerely, and imputes to us the merits of the absolute obedience of his dear Son, that we may appear in his sight to have obeyed perfectly. And this he doth, not that our happiness can profit him, but because he is good, and delights in doing good; because he loves us, and hath a favour unto us.

Whoever, then, O God! shall have washed his hands in innocency, how cheerfully will he go to thine altar? How will he love the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine Honour dwelleth, that he may shew the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all these thy wondrous works?

With gladness will he repair to thy house, and thank thee for his innocence; for the conquests he hath made over the sundry temptations with which he hath been assaulted; and that the wounds he received in the conflict, the irregular thoughts and desires which thrust themselves upon him, were not fatal to him. He will thank thee for his innocence, as knowing that that will be the most acceptable return he can make to thee for all those blessings thou bestowest upon him; and, with pleasure, consider that as the best inducement to thee to continue thy favour to him.

He will be afraid lest his absence from thy holy temple should be esteemed a disregard to thee his Almighty Benefactor; and will be uneasy in his mind, if the reasons of it do not give him full satisfaction. He will condemn himself for so far neglecting his interest and his duty, as not to have constantly paid his attendance at thy house, when he is so highly honoured by thee as to be admitted into thy service.

For the creature, then, to adore the Creator; for the offender to desire forgiveness; for the indigent to ask relief; for the relieved to be thankful; is, sure, a very reasonable service; and what is reasonable in itself, to the innocent not blinded with irregular appetites, is lovely. *O how amiable are thy dwellings to him, thou Lord of Hosts! his soul hath always a desire and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord; his heart and his flesh rejoice in the living God.*

But what part can impenitent persons bear in this cheerful duty? To praise God for the creation, which only makes them capable of eternal misery; for the redemption which they frustrate; for the address of the holy spirit whom they grieve; for the means of grace which they despise; for the hopes of glory which they forfeit; for the temporal mercies they abuse; or for the talents they misemploy; is unacceptable to God, and cannot be pleasant to themselves. As they cannot thank him with an unfeigned heart, so neither can their mouth praise him with joyful lips. *But let all these that seek thee, be joyful and glad in thee: and let all such as delight in thy salvation, say alway, the Lord be praised.*

By what hath been said, I hope it may appear how well prepared the innocent are to take a pleasure in devotion; and how impossible it is for the impenitent to love the habitation of the house of God, or to find a satisfaction in the performance of religious duties.

There is nothing more easy, or more common, than for a man, in the gaiety of his spirit, to say that he loves what indeed he doth not love, if he thinks it either reputable or useful so to do. But the wary stander-by waits to see some tokens, some effects of this love, before he will believe the profession of it to be real and sincere. He who truly loves, does indeed naturally profess it, and in the most exalted terms; nothing that he can say comes up to what he would say; of the several ways of expressing his affection, that which he prefers is not sufficient, nor reaches what his heart conceives; but then he stops not here, nor indeed can he possibly do so. For love is not an indolent, unactive principle, but warms the breast wherein it lodges with resolution to produce such fruits as will presently be known to spring from love. He, O God! who loves thy house, will do every thing in his power for the honour and prosperity of it. He will by all means endeavour to secure an interest in thee for its protection. He will lead so innocent a life, as thereby to become an acceptable and an useful member of it. He will fear to offend against the divine precepts he there learns, lest he should bring a scandal and a disreputation upon it. If he loves thy house, because thou dost inhabit there, and wilt condescend to hear the devotion

votions he comes to pay thee, he will not studiously absent himself from it, nor come late into it, nor behave himself carelessly in it, nor be guilty of any indecency in thy presence. He will bring along with him an humble, penitent, obedient, and thankful heart. He will encourage all those over whom he hath any influence, both by his example, by his conversation, and by his authority, to shew the same affection to thee in the same manner. If these are not the effects of the love we boast, we pretend a love, but have it not. We love praise, but not devotion: *the praise of men, more than the honour of God.*

That men might have a due regard to the honour of God, and, by proper acts, express their homage to him, it hath been usual to separate places built for his service from profane uses by consecration. What is intended by this pious office, is not that any absolute holiness is thereby conveyed to the material building of those places, but only such a relative sanctity as makes them justly to be esteemed holy on account of the relation they bear to God. For being dedicated to God, they become his peculiar property, we having disclaimed all right to any use of them distinct from his service; and God, by virtue of his promise, that, *when two or three are gathered together in his name, he will be there in the midst of them*, is there presumed, in a peculiar manner, to vouchsafe his presence. And this solemnity is a declaration, that they, being from henceforward to be employed in the service of God, can never hereafter, without great impiety, be degraded to a lower esteem and value, either by any abuse of them to mean and secular purposes, or by any want of decency, neatness, or proper ornaments, which is apt to alienate men's minds from that respect which is due to their sacred use; or, particularly, by introducing any vile and sinful affections into them.

The noblest consecrated fabric is not, in its own intrinsic worth, more acceptable to God than the obscurest unconsecrated closet. That which God chiefly regards is the humility, meekness, and sincerity of the votary. For *thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been,*

saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.

Nay, the costly, the beautiful, the magnificent temple of Jerusalem itself could not invite the Almighty to dwell in it, upon any other condition than that of the obedience of the resorters to it. For though, at the dedication of it, *the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord*; yet, immediately after, the Lord said to Solomon, *If you or your children will not keep my commandments, and my statutes which I have set before you—this house, which I have hallowed for my name, will I cast out of my sight.*

Neither may we affirm that any house we can build unto the Lord, can be worthy to receive him, or that he is, at any time, confined within the narrow compass of human oratories. No; the Almighty doth *not so dwell in temples made with hands. Behold the heaven, and the heaven of heavens, cannot contain him, how much less the house which any man shall build unto him?*

But, on the other hand, though God *dwelleth not in temples made with hands*; though he chooseth to be *worshipped in spirit and in truth*; and hath more regard to the temper of the suppliant, than to the place of supplication; yet let us not, from hence, imagine, that God is not pleased with having public places of worship dedicated to him.

For places set apart for religious offices, shew, that the honour of religion is thereby intended. They are apt to give men an awful sense of the duties they are about to perform; and to put them in mind, that, as those places are separated from common uses, so they should now separate their thoughts from secular affairs. Places made use of for devotion, which are otherwise employed at other times, are apt to suggest to us foreign thoughts, when we would have them confined to devotion only; and the levity that was very innocent at one time, will very improperly mix with that seriousness which becomes us at another. To build a house for the worship of God, is to honour him with our substance; nor is it fit we should offer any thing to him which costs us nothing. And we find that God was so well pleased with the temple of Solomon, that he said, *I have hallowed this house which thou hast built,*

and mine eyes and my heart shall be there perpetually. And the very intention of David to have built it was so acceptable to God, that he promised he would establish the throne of his kingdom for ever, because it had been in his heart to build a house unto his name.

To conclude : Happy are the people, who, having the true religion planted amongst them, have the Lord for their God. Happy are those societies who have places of public worship within their own walls, and set times of devotion. Knowing the precise hour of prayer, they can so order their affairs, as to attend constantly with ease. A stated time may give the penitent room to recollect, before he makes his confession. The assembly may be more numerous, their joint petitions more prevalent, and their united thanks more exalted. We have heard, that innocence alone can make our devotions, either acceptable to God, or

pleasant to ourselves. There is no believer so remiss in his duty, but intends, some time or other, to repent, and be innocent : and is apt to fix to himself certain distances of time, when he will indeed set about this important work. Time runs on. The present is only ours. Our inclination to reform is likely to be less hereafter than it is now. Life is short ; death inevitable ; our appearance at the tribunal of God certain. If, therefore, there be any here, who have hitherto neglected to begin this work in good earnest, I should think myself very happy, if I might become an instrument, in the hand of God, to the turning them to righteousness, by what hath been here, in a weak manner, but with a sincere mind, delivered by me ; and if, at the same time that this place hath the high honour to be set apart for his worship, they would be prevailed upon to dedicate themselves to his service.

SECTION X.

FROM THE

SERMONS of THOMAS ASHTON, D. D.

RECTOR of ST. BOTOLPH, BISHOPSGATE, FELLOW of ETON COLLEGE,
and late PREACHER to the HON. SOCIETY of LINCOLN'S INN.

SERMON I.

Arguments for Charity.

I PET. iv. 10.

As every one hath received the gift, minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

THE considerations, by which men may provoke themselves and each other to love and to good works, are many and very different: by the very constitution of our nature we are led, we are insensibly drawn by the cords of a man, to compassionate misery in whatever shape it appears, and to relieve it in whatever manner we are able: this is a call of nature, which, though silent, is always powerful, and sometimes irresistible; it excites in us an uneasy and troublesome feeling at the sight or hearing of distress, which we cannot overcome without doing a violence to our natural propensity, and which obliges us, for our own ease, to consult that of others. And when we have followed this generous impulse of nature, when, in compliance with this divine impression upon our minds, we have endeavoured to remove, and have been successful in removing, the weight under which our fellow-creature was labouring, the satisfaction we feel in consequence of it, is beyond any pleasure of sense; it exceeds the pain we felt while we were perceiving the pangs and throws of a wretched object, and even equals the pleasure which that very object itself is sensible of

when it is relieved from its affliction: in this circumstance it is true, that it is as blessed to give as to receive; in the consequences of this happy temper it is more so; for as this most excellent, most delightful disposition, is indulged, and becomes habitual to us, by exerting itself in the constant exercise of goodness and mercy, it diffuses a perpetual serenity and satisfaction over our hearts, and supplies the merciful mind with a continual feast. So little comparable to this solid, this social delight, which results from the reflection of having prevented or removed the difficulties of others, are all the narrow and contracted notions of the covetous, or the giddy rounds of the libertine; that, if the covetous man knew how much better interest his riches would bring him, by being bestowed on the necessities of the wretched, than by his hoarding them up useless at home; and if the prodigal could conceive how much more pleasure he would have from the same fountain than he ever had, or ever can have, from squandering them away wantonly abroad, they would both become charitable for the very reasons which now hinder them from being so, and, in compassion to themselves, would learn to compassionate the miseries, and to supply the wants, of other men.

The immediate satisfaction, then, which arises to a man's own mind, from the exercise of charity, that kind of charity I am now speaking of, which consists in relieving the natural and spiritual wants of men, is no small, no weak inducement to the practice of it.

Nor does the possession of this amiable

quality contribute more to the peace and comfort of a man's own mind, than it does to conciliate and secure the esteem of all other men. A liberal man does, of all others, stand fairest in the opinion of his neighbours. The being endowed with this single good quality, makes many little defects and blemishes in other respects to be overlooked; so that, in this sense, it is true that *charity does cover the multitude of sins*. I speak not this to encourage any man to think of screening his folly by his charity; nor do I think it commendable in any other to suffer himself to be bribed, even by a virtue, into a good opinion of a person who is wanting in many others; but thus much follows clearly from this observation, that, if liberality has such a bewitching power in it, to make us forget many failings in a defective character, it must entirely engage our affections, when it crowns the virtues of a complete one.

And indeed it has been frequently observed, that this virtue has alone been dignified with the name of *humanity*; a term which comprehends in it every excellence belonging to our nature, as if it were in itself an abstract and compendium of the whole duty of man. How desirable this character is, may be still farther seen, by considering that there is no man, how much soever he may deserve, that does not detest the contrary.

So that, if the things which are of good report, be at all deserving of our consideration, a benevolent and humane disposition must deserve it greatly. The satisfaction which arises in our own breast, from the exercise of charity, is not greater than the credit which arises from it in the opinion of other men.

And this effect of charity outlives the giver and the gift; it extends beyond the grave, it embalms and preserves the memory of the charitable man. *He hath dispersed abroad, and given to the poor; the remembrance of his beneficence endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honour*. Nay, even those from whom it was given, shall not entirely lose the benefit. The blessing of what he has given away, as well as of what he has left, shall descend to his posterity. *His seed shall be mighty upon earth, his generation shall be blessed!* What he has sown in bounty, they shall reap in blessing.

The regard, therefore, for a family,

which is too often made a reason for withholding our alms, is a very strong reason for bestowing them; and if we add to this, what daily experience tends to demonstrate, how few have been made really happier by an over-grown fortune, how many have been absolutely undone by it, we may think it but too just a judgment of the Almighty to convert those riches to the curse of our own families, which we have heaped together, without attending to the wants or merits of others, whom they were lent us barely to relieve or reward. *The rust of your gold and silver, says St. James, shall bear witness against you*: it would have wore off, if they had been employed as they ought to be; for they receive their splendor from their use: as waters corrupt, and sink in the standing pool, but flow with purity and sweetness through the running stream.

The nature of riches, as they are in themselves, whether we consider their real use or their uncertainty, is a very prevailing inducement to those who are in possession of them, to abound in acts of charity and beneficence: consider their use; they give you food and raiment; and when they have given you that, if you expect more from them, you must be disappointed: if, having that, you are not content, you will never be contented, whatever you have. Religion does not forbid you a decent provision for the necessities and conveniences of your family and yourselves; and it is out of the power of all the riches in the world to give you more.

This, if you consider their use; still further, if you take their uncertainty into account. They are as contingent as what is most so; they make themselves wings, and fly away, eluding all the arts which you invent to confine them, perhaps before you are well secured in the possession of them; frequently before you can determine to whom you shall bequeath them. Remember the case as it is stated in the gospel. A person as full of wealth, and knowing as little what he should do with it, as the richest amongst you may do, gave orders for the enlarging of his barns, forgetting that the necessities of the hungry were large enough to contain all that he had to spare; and forgetting, too, that there could be no other use to him from the increase of his stores, but to behold them with his eyes, and even that

that was more than was allotted him : for what says the wife dispenser of all things ? *Thou fool ! this night shall thy soul be required of thee ; and then whose shall all those things be which thou hast provided ? He heaped up riches, but could not tell who was to gather them. So is he, saith our Saviour, who layeth up treasure for himself, but is not rich towards God.* And, in consequence of this, he exhorted those that heard him, *to give alms ! to provide for themselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.* As if he had said, *shine away the superfluity of your wealth ; the only country where your substance is liable to no shock, is heaven, the only creditor who cannot fail is God, and the only secure fund is charity.*

Both the use, therefore, and the uncertainty of riches, are separately and jointly exceeding strong motives to charity.

The relation which subsists between us and the objects of our charity, is another earnest and prevailing call upon us to be charitable. Are they not men ; of the same nature, of the same necessities to which we ourselves are subject ; children of one common parent, professors of one common faith, heirs of one common hope ? He is not a man, who can be unconcerned at the pressing concern of any man. The ties of family, of kindred, of country, ought all to have their hold upon us, as they stand in the order of nature : but when those have had their turn, or are dissolved, even the common connexions of humanity put in a claim which requires to be heard. Consider yourself as standing in need of the assistance of those who have no nearer relation to you than as you are a man ; would you drop that plea for their protection ? No ! You cannot therefore refuse to another what you would, in the like circumstances, challenge for yourself.

As men, then, we are obliged to pay attention to the necessities of men. God, who made of one blood all the nations of the earth, expects from us that we should not hide ourselves from our own flesh.

The imitation of God is a strong incentive to do good, as far as we have power to do it. Who would not wish to be as like God as he may be ? And there is no one of God's excellent attributes in the exercise of which he more delights than in shewing mercy and goodness !

He is good, and does good ! He giveth to all men plenteously, and upbraideth none ! Wouldst thou emulate his inextinguishable blaze, throw around the rays he has communicated, and warm the little sphere in which thou art placed.

Nor is his doing good to all a stronger argument to thy charity, than the particular blessings he has conferred on thee. This is part of the argument in the text : *As every man hath received the gift, minister the same one to another ;* but this is not the whole ; for it follows, *as good stewards of the manifold grace of God !* We are here laid under a twofold obligation, an obligation of gratitude for what God has been pleased to put us in possession of, and an obligation of debt for that part of it with which he has intrusted us, not for our own only, but for other's use.

If God had given us all that we have freely, it had been our duty to make some acknowledgment to him as a benefactor ; as he has only bestowed it conditionally, it is so to make up our account with him as a master.

I shall speak to these points separately, but shortly ; from whence you will learn one reason, and the proportion of your beneficence, *as every one hath received the gift.* The objects and occasions of it, *minister the same to each other ;* to all men, as they appear to want, and you are able to give them assistance. And a yet stronger ground of duty, *as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

First, I shall illustrate this plain truth, that whatever we have, is received ; it is a part, whatever it be, of the manifold grace of God, of that inexhaustible and infinitely various favour or bounty of his, which shoots out into so many branches, which divides itself into so many streams.

Nothing, sure, can serve more to awaken our thankfulness, and excite our charity, than this mortifying question, than this upbraiding consideration : Who made thee to differ from another ? and what hast thou that thou hast not received ? Consider of what thou art composed ! He who made the heavens and the earth, who called the huge mass of which the universe is composed out of nothing ; who was under no direction but that of his own wisdom, under no control but that of his own will, might have left thee in the original nothing, out of which he was pleased to call thee ! What need

need had he of that lump of clay ! What discoverable defect would there have been in the immense circuit of matter, on account of that little portion of dust of which thou art made ?

But, even after he had made it, he might have left it still undistinguished from the common heap, as once it was, as again it will be : it would have been bounty in him to have conferred upon thee the gifts of life and sense ! of life in any shape ! of sense in any degree !

It would then have been matter of his goodness, and of thy gratitude, if he had endued thee with the least glimmering of perception, if he had placed thee in the rank of creatures which are now most contemptible, and most loathsome in thy eyes ; the meanest insect, the most abject reptile ! It would have been no inconsiderable advancement from this stage of being, to have been enabled to traverse the air, or to take thy pastime in the stream ; to be pent up in the fold, or to have ranged over the plain. I say, if thou hadst received but these gifts from God, if he had made thee to differ only in this manner from other animals, thou wouldst, even then, have been justly called upon, amongst other creatures that have breath, and above many that have it, to *praise the Lord*. But as the case now stands, the highest of these are not so much above the lowest, nor the lowest above the earth from which it is derived, as thou art above them all. And what art thou, that he should be so mindful of thee ? He has made thee a little lower than the angels, to crown thee with glory and honour. He has made thee to have dominion over the works of his hands. He has put all things in subjection under thy feet. All sheep and oxen, yea and the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, the fishes of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas ! He hath given thee powers, from which creatures swifter than thou art cannot escape, which others that are stronger than thyself cannot resist ; he has taught thee arts, by which the products of every other country are made thy own, by which thou canst apply the most unwieldy things in nature to thy use, the most disagreeable to thy pleasure, and the most poisonous to thy health.

Possibly thou mayst be of the number of those who are so far exalted above their brethren, as to excel the multitude of

their own species as much in some one, or more instances, as they do the brute creation. Perhaps thou art endued by the good pleasure of thy Creator with higher degrees of bodily perfection : thou mayst abound in health, in strength, in activity, in beauty ; probably, in the endowments of thy mind, in sagacity, in recollection, in discernment ; in delicacy of imagination, in force of reason, in the flow of eloquence.

Perhaps, again, in those manifold instances of the Divine favour, which are impiously called the gifts of fortune ; birth, inherited or acquired wealth, alliances, reputation, interest, influence, &c. These too are the gifts of God !

Shall I need to remind you of what you experience every moment, his friendly providence and protection, and the promises of its continuance ? Not content to have given you the dominion of the earth, he presents to your view the inheritance of heaven ! It is as impossible for you to forget, as it is for me to express, the wonders of his love in your redemption by Christ Jesus.

So much for what you have received. Let us now see in what proportion your bounty should flow : even in the same proportion in which you have received it : *as every one hath received the gift, minister the same. Freely ye have received, freely give.* This is a point which every man may better settle with himself than any one can determine for him. Let us deal impartially with ourselves on this head however, and we shall find that even those who labour and work with their hands in honest employments are not exempt from the obligation of giving to him who needeth.

If so, every remove from the necessity of labour is a new inducement to charity. And as we may see our obligation in some degree by comparing our station with that of men below us, so we may likewise compare ourselves at present with what we may have formerly been. It will be no useless reflexion to recollect, "that what was bounty in us in one circumstance, will be meanness in another." It would be a reproach upon him who has ten talents to give no more than he does who is intrusted only with one.

But enough of the proportion : encourage carefully in yourselves a just sense of the favours you have received, and that

that will not fail to lead you to discern the proper returns you ought to make for them. I hasten now to the objects and occasions for which God has been pleased to confer his manifold mercies on you. *As every man hath received the gift, minister the same one to another.*

The report which you have heard read twice, and which will now be, in substance, repeated to you, will point out to you many opportunities of expressing your gratitude for these inestimable favours, many demands upon your benevolence, and open many doors to your compassion.

[Report read.]

From (the substance of) the report you see how many thousands of your fellow-creatures are made yearly better for the beneficence of those who have gone before you; but, while we commend their charity, we excuse not yours, since you see likewise, though they have done much, there is much still left for you to do; as in every branch of these extensive provisions the objects of charity exceed the funds for it. This is matter of complaint to them; but it will be matter of no complaint to them, and of great satisfaction to yourselves, if you give yourselves an inclination in proportion as God has given you a power of abating the miseries of your brethren.

I shall be short in what I have to say; but I shall speak very plainly, as I speak in the name of him who has but lent you all which you call your own; and if he were to pluck away the feathers in which he has been pleased to dress us, should we be now called upon to give, or suing to receive mercy? Let our inclinations then to do good, in general, keep pace with the opportunities we have of doing it, and let the number of our blessings dictate to us the measure of our bounty. And what occasions offer themselves here for displaying it! Is there one instance of necessity, either in body or mind, to which our frail nature is subject, which we do not endeavour either to obviate, or remove, or in some degree relieve, in one or other of these appointments? Is there a necessity, to which human nature is liable, which it is not in the power of men to redress? Shall we complain then of Providence, or of ourselves? Let us adore rather the tender severities of our Maker, who has vouchsafed to found our excel-

lence upon our imperfections, and from our weakness deduce our strength, in making the very infirmities of our brethren the occasion of their virtues, and of our own. If any thing be wanting, take the blame to thyself! Let God be true, and every man a liar.

The first and most epidemical source of misery to individuals, and to society, is the want of proper training in infancy. Your childhood being neglected, your youth is headstrong, and your advanced age always useless, often burthensome, sometimes even pernicious to the community and to yourselves. These inconveniences we endeavour here to obviate, by easing the industrious parents from the burthen of more than a thousand children every year, or the innocent children from the difficulties which arise from having a wicked parent, or from having none. Consider

How small is the difference in the beginning between a bad man and good one! How wide a distance is made in the progress, both to the persons themselves, and those with whom they are connected! Does not nature plainly teach you this? Of two seeds apparently equal, which you are sowing, suppose it is of wheat, or of some other, any other, grain, how different is the fate of them, as they are thrown into proper soil, or dropped by the way side! Even so fares it with the minds of men. And where canst thou choose a better soil for their culture than this charity? As thou art a friend then to thyself, to the poor, to thy country, to mankind, to the universe, to the cause of virtue, and devoted to the author of it, lend thy hand to extend the arms of this excellent institution, and make it as comprehensive as it is excellent.

And by rectifying this great work of education, thou wilt make that other part of correction in a degree unnecessary. Few want the last, who have not originally been wanting in the first. But even this, though evil, while it is necessary, is good; and may have its use, if not to the sufferer, yet perhaps to him who sees him suffer. Happy, if, whom reason cannot reclaim, the fear of correction may! Happy for him who can profit at the easy expence of another's punishment, and by another's stripes be healed!

Nay, I make no doubt but the care of education

education may prevent in many cases distraction too; in all those cases which arise from irregular passions, and, which is not the least, nor least dreadful instance of madness, from wild and gloomy and frightful notions of the author of our being and blessings. Horrible it is from any cause to see that exquisite piece of architecture, the mind of man, like a shattered temple, lie in ruin and confusion; but to see it blasted by that flame, which should at the same time enlighten and comfort it, is yet more melancholy. O guard us, Heaven, from that last illusion, that keenest instrument of hell, despair! True religion is a cheering, as well as a burning light; it was only the strange fire of Nadab and Abihu, which consumed those who offered it. Oh! prevent with ease, what it may be difficult to eradicate; and relieve that case which hardly admits a remedy! Oh! express your sense of the high value of your own understanding, by a sober use of it, and by extending a proper care to these unhappy objects, who appear indeed like men, but in reality have nothing left of the human nature but the miseries to which it is subject, being banished, as it were, from the community, and from themselves before their time!

The time would fail me, and, if the time would allow me, I should want power to represent faithfully to your imaginations the various calamities of almost fifteen thousand objects, who are thankful for the relief they receive from the other hospitals, and of great numbers, who are yet praying in vain to receive it. Go visit these houses of human infirmity, and of divine discipline! Thou that exuldest in health and strength, see how different will be thy state, when thou art divested of either! Take thy pictures of distress here from the life, and indulge the sentiments which thy nature will suggest on the occasion; then reflect, who made thee to differ from the objects that excite thy pity, that demand thy assistance; then remember that thou art but *a steward of the manifold grace of God!*

The blessings you have received have not been thrown into your laps upon your own account merely; for where, then, would have been that fatherly concern, that common care of God over all his children? those tender mercies which extend over all his works?—You are here

told for what purposes you have received these gifts, and in what proportions you are to dispense them. *As every man hath received, minister to each other, as stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

God, when he was pleased to put into your hands the abundance of this world's good, enjoined you to dispose of it under the prospect of another: when he thought proper to employ you in the trust, it is a mistake to suppose that he intended to divest himself of the property!

He has appointed you stewards, not masters, of what he has vouchsafed to put into your possession!

And it is required of a steward that he be faithful. It is the proper duty of those who transact business for others, to employ the owner's property to the uses for which he has designed it. If God had made no condition (after having placed such confidence in you) could you have thought of making no return?

Since he has charged you with these things for the use of others, it will be the height of injustice to pervert them to your own, or convert them to none!

And who knows how soon he may exact an account? Though he has referred the general audit to a late day, he has not so withdrawn himself from the immediate government of the world, as not to make us often sensible, that it is not directed without him.

You know not how soon the wealthiest amongst us may want the charity himself, which he refuses another. Alas! what is the substance of any individual to Him! The kingdoms of the earth are his, and he giveth them to whomsoever he will. He changes the greatest property in an instant; and then, what part have you in all your possessions, but that which you have bestowed as you ought! He armeth the elements against us; he bringeth low and lifteth up! He poureth contempt upon princes, and destroyeth all the distinctions amongst men! So absolutely does he retain the disposal of all things, though he permits us at his pleasure to partake of them for a while, *that no man can assure himself what one moment may bring forth.*

He confounds and overturns things which seem most fixed, by channels imperceptible to us; a standing admonition to us of his sovereignty, and our dependence; a lasting warning to fidelity in every

every trust, for the execution of which we shall so certainly, and may so suddenly, be called to account!

Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom the Lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?

Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing!

You see by how many and by what powerful arguments a man is encouraged to acts of liberality: whether he consider the pleasure or the credit which will arise from his beneficence; whether he look forward to the blessings which generally attend the posterity of the liberal, or the curse which too often hangs over the house of the covetous, whom God abhorreth; whether he reflect how little of all his wealth he can in reality enjoy himself, or how slender a security he has for the continuance and the disposal of the rest; whether he look upon the close affinity there is between him and those who want his help, or the amiable example of that over-ruling power, who is the common friend and father of them both; whether he turn his eyes upon the favours he has received, or upon the end for which they were conferred upon him; each of these considerations, when single, call upon him, and when they are united, one should hope, would compel him to be charitable.

If, therefore, either your own satisfaction, or the opinion of other men; if the hope of peculiar protection, or the fear of uncommon miseries on those whose happiness is wound up in your own; if the true use, or the great uncertainty, of all that you possess; if the kindred infirmities of those who look up for your assistance; if the wise conduct or high authority of Him, who has put it in your power to give it; if a grateful sense of inestimable mercies, or a faithful execution of the most important trusts, be considerations, which cannot fail to influence every man in some degree, and the best men in the highest; then *as every one hath received the gift, minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

To the King eternal, immortal, invincible, the only great and good and glorious God, be all honour and power and praise ascribed for ever!

SERMON II.

Christian Instruction one principal Instance of Charity.

LUKE, vii. 22.

To the poor the gospel is preached.

AMONGST the infinite sorts of wretchedness under which this everchanging and corrupted state of ours is perpetually labouring, there is no one which seems more to deserve the compassion, or to call more loudly for the assistance, of all thinking men, than that most deplorable of all disorders, a total ignorance of what we are, and for what end we were made.

Is it possible to conceive a situation more dreadful than his, the eyes of whose understanding are blinded? Who is entirely in the dark as to every principle of religious or of moral knowledge: an absolute stranger to all the cheerful notices of heavenly truth: unacquainted with the providence, or even with the existence, of God: uninformed of that future and immortal life to which the present is only preparatory, and for which it is to be considered merely as an introduction of probation and trial: insensible of the permanent distinctions of right and wrong: uninterrupted by the silent remonstrances of a reproving mind: let loose from the gentle restraint of human ties; given up to the wild impulse of brutal appetite: who can look upon every virtue without affection, and behold their contraries without abhorrence: neither allured to good by hope, nor deterred by fear from evil?

That this is far from being a wild and imaginary representation of the case and consequences of a thorough want of instruction, I wish we were at a loss for instances to make out the proof: but if the character seem to any one to be too strongly drawn, I shall leave it upon the credit of its author, for it is not mine, but St. Paul's. The picture which that apostle hath left us of the ancient nations is the same in features, though the colouring may differ a little, with that which I have just exhibited to you. You shall see it as it was originally drawn by that masterly hand.

He

He represents them as *strangers to the covenant, having no hope; being without a sense of God in that world which he had made: as having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the Divine life, through the ignorance that was in them, because of the blindness of their heart: as by nature children of wrath, dead in trespasses and sins: as having once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air; that spirit which even now worketh in the children of disobedience: as walking in the vanity of their mind, having no sense of shame, giving themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all kinds of impurity, with an insatiable appetite: as having their conversation in the lusts of the flesh; fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the imagination: foolish, disobedient, deceived; enslaved to different desires of pleasure, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.*

A representation that shocks you! Yet it is one, the ingredients of which are considered by the apostle as the natural and unavoidable product of inward blindness.

But this, you will say, was only the case in those times of darkness at which God in the secret workings of his providence, is said to have winked. The world, it may be imagined, that part of it at least which is dignified with the Christian name, is now, in this mid-day of revelation, so entirely enlightened, as to leave no room any longer for such horrid suppositions. What farther complaint can there be of ignorance in matters of religion? What possibility for the spreading of that infection, when God himself has prepared so effectual a remedy: when all the truths which have any necessary reference to the present or future state of men, are so clearly published to the world: when the gospel is preached, not only to the mighty, to the rich, to the wise, to the learned; but to the very dregs of the people, to the illiterate, to the ignorant, to the poor: when the knowledge of the glory of God covers the earth, as the waters when the sea overflows?

Blessed state, indeed, if this were so! But who is so happily ignorant of the mischiefs, or the miseries that surround him, as not to know that this is not? God has undoubtedly provided a remedy sufficient in itself to correct this disorder,

and to prevent the effects of it: but what is any remedy before it is applied?

The revelation of the will of God by Jesus Christ is beyond all reasonable doubt a sovereign antidote against all pernicious ignorance to all who are acquainted with it, to all to whom it is known. But what comfort is that to those who know nothing of it? And how great a part that is of those who are included in the common name of Christianity, they who have looked most curiously into the lower, shall I say? or higher scenes of human life, are amazed to find. It is plain beyond contradiction, that (notwithstanding the full manifestation which God has been pleased to make of his good-will towards men, in opening to them the glories of his future kingdom) there is a part, and that no small one, of the Christian world, which continues to this hour in absolute darkness. And yet who dare allow himself to doubt whether the light, which God has been pleased to propagate in the world, be not answerable to all the purposes of real knowledge and final happiness? How is this? It seems to be contradictory and unintelligible. But one single consideration will reconcile this apparent inconsistency, and make the whole as plain as it is certain.

The moral government of God by Jesus Christ is confessed to contain an universal remedy for all hurtful ignorance; but it affords a remedy for ignorance in such a manner as his natural government does for poverty. He has in his goodness given the earth to the children of men, and the produce of it is sufficient for the support of every man: but what advantage has he from that, who is now perishing for want! He has likewise, in his mercy, given us a light to guide the feet of men into the way of peace, a light sufficient for the direction of every man who cometh into the world: but what information hath he from hence, who is now sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death! It is undoubtedly as far from the intent of God that any man should want necessary food, as it is that any one should be destitute of necessary knowledge: in either case, he has made an ample provision for the exigencies of all; but this provision, though it seems at first to be thrown in common, yet, by the different powers of body and mind with which we are endowed, and by a variety of

of providential contingencies, it becomes at last so unequally distributed, that, far from being dealt alike to each man, it is often intrusted for one in the hands and made subject to the direction of another. Here then begins the defect, and hence arises the complaint. What was intended by God as a peculiar blessing to one part of mankind, by making them the benefactors, and in some sort (may I express it unblamed?) the saviours of each other, becomes, if it be neglected, a common misery to each division of men. To some a crime, in withholding the relief or instruction with which they are intrusted for the good of their brethren; to the rest a misfortune, in not receiving that support or information which was provided for them, but deposited for their use in other hands.

Hence it is, that though God has declared expressly in his law, *that the poor shall eat and be satisfied*, yet we see them pining in wretchedness, and perishing in distress: though he has as openly assured us in his gospel, that one of the fairest fruits of that gospel is, *that the poor shall have that comfortable discovery made unto them*, yet we find them involved in a cloud of as thick darkness, as if the day-spring from on high had never visited us, as if life and immortality had not yet been brought to light!

As this consideration serves to vindicate the way of God, it may also help to regulate the ways of man on this subject. When we reflect with how gracious a condescension Providence has been pleased to admit us into a partnership, as it were, of his works, by leaving some share of his great designs for us to finish, with what a grateful joy should we embrace the happy opportunity of diffusing good to those who want, and reflecting glory on him who enables us to do so? and not, like that unjust steward who engrosseth to himself the bounty of his lord, at the same time defraud the poor, and dishonour our Master.

God would want no advocate, if men were as punctual as they should be, in executing the parts which he has assigned to them in his dispensations. These apparent defects in the administration of his providence would then carry the visible marks of wisdom and goodness on the face of them; the want of one man, being supplied by the affluence of another,

would lay a lasting foundation for the reciprocal duties of humanity and gratitude; of benevolence on both sides; and God would appear equally wise, equally good, in what he has denied, as in what he has given!

Take heed, therefore, that you rob not the poor of his right, yourselves of a pleasure, and God of his glory; but *let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven*. And do this in all instances where he has been pleased to appoint you his instruments to relieve the distresses of your brethren. This would open a large field for the heart of the benevolent, and for the tongue of the persuasive, exceeding all the powers of one, and equal to the most enlarged capacity of the other. But the occasion confines us now to narrower bounds. For it is not the relief of poverty in general, and in itself, that I am going to recommend to your care; not the relief of poverty, I mean, as it consists in the absolute want of all the natural comforts and conveniences and necessities of life; as it is compounded of hunger and thirst, and nakedness and cold, the loss of friendship, of liberty, the universal desertion of every help which nature grieves for the want of; nor, yet farther, as it draws on a long catalogue of bodily disorders, beginning sometimes suddenly in pain and misery, ending too often slowly in death: these, I say, are not the lights in which I propose at present to represent poverty unto you, but barely as it exposes men to the want of all proper information relating to the state and condition of their nature. This I take to be by much the most unhappy circumstance which attends on poverty, more so than all its natural evils united in their most frightful forms.

It is, therefore, to attempt to remove the moral inconveniences of poverty, that I stand now before you as an advocate for the poor, not supplicating for food only, but for instruction; not for the bread which perisheth, but for that *living bread which cometh down from heaven*; not intreating you barely to clothe their bodies, but to secure them against the more miserable nakedness of a neglected mind; not soliciting you to provide even against those dreadful diseases, indigence and pain, but to prevent the more malignant disorders of ignorance and guilt.

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Since the poor are brought under so many disadvantages into this world, let us endeavour at least to infuse that comfortable cordial into their hearts, the hope of a better. And that I may not so far accept the person of the poor as, under the notion of charity, to persuade you to any thing which is not in itself highly reasonable, or by any motive which is otherwise, I shall consider the duty and excellence of preaching the gospel to the poor; and shall encourage you according to your different stations and abilities to charitable contributions, as a proper exercise of that duty, by shewing you,

That supplying the want of religious instruction to the poor is a very high instance of Christian charity; and that these schools for the poor may be made, and I hope are an excellent mean of supplying them with religious instruction.

I say then, that to supply the want of religious instruction to the poor is a very high instance of Christian charity.

It is an old observation of one of the most admired authors of antiquity, "that no one thing raises man nearer to a similitude of the divine nature, than contributing to the welfare of mankind." And it is as certain, that nothing does in fact conduce so much to the happiness of man, either as an individual or in society, as the knowledge and practice of true religion. To propagate the sense of this amongst men, is to provide more effectually for their happiness, than to relieve all the other wants, and to cure all the other diseases in the world. This, therefore, above all things, is to be attempted by him, who is desirous of doing the greatest and most lasting good to mankind. To compassionate the afflicted, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, are all excellent works, and some may think that the whole (and no doubt a great part) of charity does consist in these; but yet let me shew you a more excellent way, even than that which the apostle accounts most excellent; for as much as charity excels the other virtues, so much does this kind of charity excel all other charities. We have it from his own authority, that a man may give all his goods to the poor, and yet be a stranger to that truly Christian spirit, which puts men upon instructing the ignorant, which impels us to open the eyes of the spiritually blind, and to infuse hope into the desponding soul.

The preservation of any thing, we know, is to be valued in proportion to the estimate we make of the thing which is preserved; as much, therefore, as the mind of man is confessedly preferable to any thing else which relates to him, so much is this kind of charity in reason to be preferred to any other. The excellence of every charity must, in the nature of the thing, be computed from the advantage arising from thence to the respective objects of them; and what is there that we can put in competition, upon the foot of advantage to men, with the Gospel of Jesus Christ? It is the charity of God himself! I may be allowed to call it so, since it is peculiarly and by way of eminence so called throughout his whole revelation: it is that last best gift, which he, in the excess of his goodness, has so freely bestowed upon the children of men; in which every other glimmering of his favour, which he has been pleased, in a diversity of manner and degree, to communicate to his servants, seem to unite as in a centre; and to which any one, or all of them, bear no other proportion than as the early dawn to the meridian sun.

And as every thing, as it has a clear preference in nature and reason, is always considered as having it in the injunction of Christ, it may make the argument come more home to you, when you see in what rank and degree of precedence this duty stands in the opinion, by the declaration, of Christ himself. The passage, of which the words I first repeated to you are a part, is worth observing, and will set this matter in the strongest light.

The disciples of the Baptist came to Jesus, by order of their master, to have a doubt removed, which some of them had conceived, relating to his deputation from God: it seems, they found Jesus (as indeed his custom was) instructing the people, and giving credit to his instructions by exerting the most uncommon powers. They propose their own or their master's scruple to him; with regard to which he returns nothing directly in answer, but bids them barely relate, upon their return to the prophet, what they had seen and heard: *that the blind had their sight restored; the lepers were made clean from their leprosy; the deaf recovered the sense of hearing; the lame ceased to be so; even the dead were*

were raised to life again, and the poor had the gospel preached to them.

One cannot help observing, that there is evidently a gradation of ideas in this account, and preaching the gospel to the poor, has plainly the preference in common construction to all the miraculous facts, even to that master-piece of all, the resurrection from the dead. A plain confession, that the most amazing instances of divine power are considered by God himself, as inferior to this simple effort of his goodness. The first seems to be represented barely as the evidence, the latter absolutely as the end, of his mission: the one a necessary seal of his ministry, the other the actual exercise of his office.

And this, in so many words, he declares it to be, when he applies that emblematical prophecy of Isaiah to himself; *The spirit of the Lord is upon me for that cause for which he anointed me. He sent me to preach the gospel to the poor; that is, in other words, to heal those that are broken in heart, to proclaim release to the captive, to give sight to the blind, to abate the pain of the wounded, to publish the acceptable year of the Lord.*

The whole prophecy is clearly relative to the moral state of man; and represents a change in that to be the grand and ultimate design of the coming of Christ: in what other sense, indeed, could he be said to give liberty to the captive, who called himself a prisoner, and whose immediate followers were exposed to persecution and chains? or what, again, in point of real profit to the world, was the healing some bodily diseases in any particular age, the influence of which could hardly go beyond the next, in comparison of the greater and more extensive cure of a darkened, of a disordered mind? a cure, without which, life itself is but as a fleeting vision, as an uneasy dream; and immortality, neither to be wished nor to be endured.

Let us remember, too, that as the duty is delightful, the neglect of it is unpardonable. What wretch would shut up the light, which will not shine less upon him after he has communicated it to a thousand others? You tremble at that barbarous usage of the Heathen, in exposing their infants to hunger and cold, or beasts of prey; and are you Christians, then, who suffer your children to perish for lack of knowledge? exposing them to that devourer of souls, who goeth about seeking

whom he may devour; and, by giving them no principles, or worse than none, make it better for them that they had never been born?

Having thus shewn you how high a rank preaching the gospel to the poor possesses amongst the number of Christian duties, I proceed to let you see, that contributing to these schools of the poor is a proper exercise of this duty, as they are a certain mean of instilling the principles of religion and a godly life into the minds of the poor. Not that I would have it imagined, while I consider this as the greatest, that it is the only want which is supplied by these institutions; it is well known how many other necessities are obviated here, which, though inferior to this, are no light burden to those who are struggling under them; the detail of which might awaken compassion in the most insensible, and steal a tear from the eye of mirth and gaiety. But of this, perhaps, at some other time and place. Let us now look upon these schools in this single point of view, as a provision for the religious principles of the poor.

The simplest child cannot here be ignorant that there is one only Potentate, who alone possesses immortality, by whom all things subsist: "That this power, though we see him not, is yet always present in effect; and does see, and does preside over all; that no distance of place can remove us from his reach; no length of time erase us from his remembrance, nor the most palpable darkness screen us from his sight. That he is absolutely unbiassed and impartial, making no distinction, nor admitting any, amongst his reasonable creatures, but that which piety and virtue makes. That, perfect as he is in himself, yet, in condescension to our infirmities, he has appointed, according to the inexplicable counsel of his own will, a man like ourselves, one once as poor as the poorest of us now, to be the governor, the intercessor, the propitiation, and the judge of the moral world; the rule of whose government is, on the part of those to whom it is revealed, an honest endeavour to comply with the whole will of God, in conformity to the law of our nature: on his part, assistance, by the gracious influences of his holy spirit on our feeble aims at penitence and piety; pardon for unavoidable weakness, and even for wilful offence repented of and forsaken;

faken; reconciliation to God, and a well-grounded hope of happiness beyond conception, and without end, in his future kingdom. In defect of the condition on our part, aversion on the part of God, rejection from his favour, with a terrible expectation of all, and more than all, those horrors which guilt, remorse, shame, anguish, and despair, can suggest to a mind conscious of the infinite happiness it has lost, of the inconceivable misery it has incurred, by not embracing the offers of God's all-meeting mercy, by forcing the efforts of his unwilling vengeance."

This is an abstract of that gospel which is preached to these poor; this is the salutary lesson which may be learned in this school.

I do not pretend that the knowledge of these truths shall always, and every where, produce the practical inference, and make those who know them act as if they had them ever in their eye: but there can be no doubt that they will influence as far as any moral arguments can influence, and the more, as they are more intimately and habitually known: they are as an anchor to the soul, safe and firm; it may be subject to be tossed, notwithstanding, by every little storm, to be in danger from a great one: but no common violence can force it from its hold.

But religion is not taught here as an empty speculation, but as a rule to go by. Children are trained up early to act those parts for which Providence seems to have designed them in this life, in hope of being applauded in the next: they are habituated to do what they are born to do; at a time when impressions are easiest to make, and, when once made, most difficult to erase. Religion, thus early interwoven with their employments, becomes the colour of their life. Their duty and their devotion go hand in hand. At the plough, or at the loom, or in whatever honest labour they are engaged, every act of their station is a reasonable service to God, and the lifting up of their hands an acceptable sacrifice.

Some persons have entertained wonderful apprehensions that religion, and as much learning as may help a man to employ himself in it, may prove a great obstruction to labour, and of disservice to the public. I know not what religion this must be; I am sure it cannot be the Christian. A religion, whose chief end is

to teach us the employment of every talent, cannot lead us to neglect the improvement of any; unless you can be led into idleness and injustice, by being laid under a double obligation to industry and fidelity. Methinks we should not grudge the poor the knowledge of the alphabet, if it were but to have them able to read this short lesson, which I fancy those who scruple the matter most, would have no objection to see written in letters of gold in every seminary of instruction for the poor.

Servants, obey in all things your masters, not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God: and whatever you do, do heartily; as to the Lord, and not to men; knowing, that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ! But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong he hath done; and there is no respect of persons with God.

Others, again, are alarmed, lest reason should suffer by the early introduction of religious prejudice. Leave reasonable creatures, say they, to the direction of their reason; what have they to do with any judgment but their own? Let their religion be the result of free inquiry: it will be time enough to fix upon one, when they have finished the other: these, we presume, are philosophers, professors of humanity in every sense, who, in compassion to the miseries to which we are subjected by the tyranny of education, offer their generous aid to free us from the bondage of prejudice. Do they understand that nature they are so ready to relieve? If they sow no good seed in the minds of children, what insurance have they against this wicked world, that it shall sow no bad seed in them? If they will not take the pains to inculcate habits of religion into young people, who tell them that they will not choose for themselves other habits, and of another cast? Is it reason then alone that governs in the infancy of human nature? Is there nothing of a lower stamp, which is with care, which is with difficulty, by our virtue, or by calling in a higher power, to be regulated, if not subdued? You are parent, suppose; of the variety of dishes which are served up at table, do you allow your child to choose where he pleases and in what degree, taking for granted his reason will direct him, and that then

is no danger of his being mistaken? I dare say, you are too wise to indulge his appetite to the destruction of his health: but is not this interposition an infringement on natural liberty? It is; you must consult, however, the health of his body: I will not think so meanly of you, as not to presume you have at least an equal regard to the vigour of his mind. Is there no danger that his taste may lead him as much to his hurt in his amusements, in his opinions, in his acquaintance? Do you leave him in these to his judgment, and to the decisions of his never-erring reason, which, if not just now, will not fail, upon experience, to remonstrate? Let us see how far you may be able to correct what you are unwilling to prevent: let his body be bent double for want of care, and bid him walk upright when he comes to a sense of his deformity: will his reason teach him to articulate? or to alter any disagreeable accent which he has imbibed with his nurse's milk? Ah, simple wisdom! What husbandman neglects the seed time, and expects the harvest? Let an unkindly spring blast his bloom, and when will that autumn come that will yield thee fruit?

Thou fanciest thyself all this while to abound in good-nature as thou dost in sense. Equally, I own, in both: let us weigh this honestly. Thou art fixed here in a world in which these infants have just got footing. They walk as thou art pleased to direct them. They depend upon thy experience, and such as thine; and thou art in trust (as each generation is for the succeeding one) for their virtue, and for their happiness. Thou knowest (if thou hast thought enough to know any thing), that in this wilderness, through which we are passing, there is but one sure road to the point at which they aim: it is impossible to say how many there are in which they may be entangled and lost. Wilt thou then give them a plain direction, and repeat it often? or wilt thou leave them, by fatal experience, to find that they have been miserably mistaken?

Or, they are embarked in a long voyage, upon a boisterous sea, wilt thou supply them with thy compass, or leave them to the uncertain guidance of moon and stars: is not thy philosophy madness, and thy tenderness inhumanity?

It is no easy matter for the best of parents, with all the bias they can throw

in by instruction, example, and habit, on the side of virtue, to bring their children exactly to the mark. How much less then is to be expected from those who have no parents, or poor and perhaps vicious ones? It is bad enough to be without a guide; to have a wicked one is still worse: and what a seminary for youth are the streets of this populous city, where the contagion of wickedness insinuates itself at every sense, before they are capable of distinguishing between good and evil. Hence arises a peculiar propriety for erecting any school of virtue in this place; where tares spring up so fast, it requires a double share of attention to cultivate the better seed. We talk of a Christian country; but I should be glad to know in what vices we fall short of any idolatrous nation? Christianity is to the moral world what the sun is to the natural. The sun, we see, may shine with all its lustre, and yet there are places of the earth so unfortunately situated, that no ray of light can ever reach them. *And if the light which is in us be darkness, how great is that darkness!*

Let us now look back a little, and take a short review of the case, as it respects the poor, the public, and ourselves.

First: Let us consider it in reference to the poor: the question on that foot is plainly this—Whether, by instilling a proper sense of things into their minds, you would lay a foundation for their virtue and happiness; or, by leaving them still in the dark, expose them to the contagion of wickedness and misery? We have seen to what degrees of wretchedness the ignorance of necessary truth did actually sink the old world, and we know the case is even now little better with those who continue unacquainted with the gospel; and there is strong probability, that the generality of the poor must inevitably be of that number, without the help of some such provisions as these. By this method you put them in possession of truths which are the best remedy for all the inconveniences, and the strongest security against all the dangers, of their condition. We may reflect, therefore, that, by such contributions, we attempt, at least, to relieve a number of unhappy objects from all that load of impiety, blasphemy, dishonesty, discontent, and envy, to which the uninstructed poor are laid under strong temptations, by the very circumstances of

their station; and let that reflection, on all proper occasions, influence our charity.

Consider it once more in its tendency towards the public.

These poor creatures are not only to be considered in themselves, but as members of society; not only as capable of a private happiness or misery, but as capable too of influencing the happiness or misery of the community: their improvements, consequently, in knowledge and duty, or the want of them, will be sensibly felt by the public, when they are thrown upon the world. As they are generally destined to servitude, it is worth considering how much the ease and security of families do necessarily depend upon the integrity and fidelity of those who serve them. These infants, as they are now, will, before we are aware, have their parts to act in the business and intercourse of mankind; and it is yet, in some degree, in our own power to determine which way they shall act them. By proper care, or by neglect of their religious principles, you may make them either an industrious, modest, humble, useful, or an idle, dissolute, insolent, pernicious body of citizens. You may make them the ornament or disgrace, the universal advantage or common pest, of society. Think which of these presents you would chuse to make to the public: will you send a flock of sheep, or let loose a den of wild beasts amongst them? And let that consideration, as opportunity offers, excite your bounty.

We will take a last view of it, as it concerns yourselves. If you have no regard for the virtue of these children, if you have no concern for the good of society; both which I must conclude to be directly otherwise; you certainly have some regard for yourselves. And who does not see how much his own happiness depends upon the principles of those about him? who does not know how very different the state of his present felicity must unavoidably be, as he is accidentally involved with those that have principles, or those that have none, or worse than none? and who does not see, too, that if they are not taught the true gospel, which breathes *good-will towards men, and peace on earth*; the promotion of which gives the truest glory to God on high; they may soon be instructed in another gospel, which, by

divorcing religion from virtue, and by that means confounding the distinction between good and evil, must be as dishonourable to the Creator, as it may prove injurious to his creatures?

It has been shewn, too, "that it is the great duty of every Christian to propagate the light of Christianity;" and this is, perhaps, the only way that many, the best way that most of us, have of performing this duty. We are laid under an agreeable necessity, therefore; and woe be to them (as the great Apostle said of himself) who do not, in this sense, *preach the gospel*. Let this consideration make you cheerful givers. Think, only, when Providence calls upon you in any of these human ministrations, that this mite of mine, whatever it be, which this moment is of no use to me, and may be employed the next to my hurt, may, when it is thrown into this channel, be converted into so much knowledge and virtue to the poor, so much ease and security to the public, and lay a foundation, in conjunction with my other duties, for my reception, when I fail here, into habitations which shall last for ever.

In short, if the state of the world, with regard to religion and manners, must always have been as bad as we see it once was, without a plain rule of life, guarded by reasonable hopes and fears, from the engaging prospects of divine love, and the horrible apprehensions of abused mercy; if the general publication of the gospel can make no visible alteration in the case, unless it be personally, and practically, and early inculcated; if this be a trust, as confessedly it is, reposed in every Christian, and required of every one in proportion to his opportunity and his power; if an individual, however sensible of the duty, might yet be diffident of his ability, or doubtful as to the direction of it: how are the interests of private and public happiness indebted to that useful society, whose general design it is, to convert the least supply of every charitable Christian, by the best methods that shall offer, to the promotion of Christian knowledge: a society, which, as it intends only the advancement of common good, is always as ready to be informed, as assisted in the ways of advancing it; which is willing to give the plainest and the shortest answer to every objection, by reforming, as far as possible, the thing which

which is objected to; which is attempting to do the very best thing that can be done, by the very best means that can be suggested? And as example is ever more powerful than precept, being a lesson which the most illiterate can read, a direction by which the most unthinking cannot be misled; and as the higher this light is placed, the more diffusive must its influence be; what an accessional support must this society receive from the declaration of our most excellent prince, who has begun to form his kingdom upon the model of that for which he is reserved; having proclaimed to all men, "that virtue shall be the only passport to his royal favour; and that he knows of no party amongst his subjects beyond the distinction of good and bad." Happy are the people, who, beside all other motives to piety, are drawn by that rare but prevailing argument, the example of their Sovereign!

Go on, illustrious sire, to fix the stability of your own and your nation's glory on the only solid basis, a Christian's hope. Let others arrogantly assume the titles of Most Catholic and Most Christian, whilst it is your just praise to be literally, to be truly both; who afford the best defence to our holy faith, the surest patronage to true religion, a religious life; who animate by your conduct what is enjoined by your authority. May the all-pervading Spirit co-operate with the dispositions it inspires into your royal breast; may your subjects as universally emulate as they approve, till the influence of your high character shall have diffused itself beyond the circle of your immediate presence to the remotest isles of this united country, till these happy kingdoms become the ornament of earth, and the delight of Heaven.

S E R M O N III.

Religion the great Security against the Delusions of Sin.

HEB. iii. 12, 13.

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened, through the deceitfulness of sin.

It is an old and just observation, "that no man ever became completely wicked

at once." There is a necessary gradation in the attainments of vice, as well as in those of virtue. Application, habit, and experience, are requisite to make a person a consummate master even in evil arts. A man cannot, without some time, some labour, and some difficulty, arrive at the infamous honour of being eminently bad.

The infinitely-good God, foreseeing the strong proclivity of human nature to evil, has placed certain obstructions in its way, as barriers to its progress in vice.

The consciousness of the deformity and depravity of sin, the fear of discovery, and the apprehension of future vengeance, are happy obstacles to the precipitate course of the sinner, and preserve him, against his will, from destruction. One cannot but look upon this as one of the most merciful dispensations of Heaven, that it has rendered even our descent to evil difficult; and made it almost impossible for us to fall, unless we are determined to take pains to do it.

But, notwithstanding all the kind restraints of conscience, of shame, and the terrors of futurity, which Providence has mercifully opposed to the progress of sin, it does, however, make wonderful advances in the world; and whatever difficulties Heaven has been pleased to interpose between men and their misery, they seem in general to be too unfortunately successful in surmounting them all.

They find out ingenious ways to deafen their ears to the friendly rebukes of conscience, to steel their faces against the sudden expressions of shame, and to harden their hearts against the fear of final retribution. Then it is, and not till then, that they can go on smoothly from one wickedness to another, till they have absolutely unlearned the practice, and excluded themselves from the rewards, of virtue.

Yet, sure, it is matter of astonishment to think, that men should be so much enemies to themselves; that they should so industriously, so artfully, contrive to secure their own ruin; which Heaven had taken such wise, such endearing precautions to prevent.

The best reason that can be assigned for such unnatural conduct, indeed the only one I know, is that which is suggested by the Apostle in the words before us:

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from

from the living God; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. As if he had said, "Be extremely cautious how you entertain any disposition to infidelity, which may induce you to quit your dependance upon the only Being that is able to support you, and expose you to every delusion of unruly passion, till your hearts become at last so hardened as to be no longer susceptible of any impression of virtue or religion."

The words (if this may be admitted as an explication of them) imply two assertions.

First—A man cannot entirely abandon himself to the commission of evil, till he has absolutely excluded the apprehension of God from his thoughts; and farther,

Secondly—When this apprehension of the Deity is once suppressed, a man may be led imperceptibly, by the delusive attraction of error, through each successive degree of impiety, till he arrive at last at a state of absolute insensibility and final impenitence.

I shall now attempt to illustrate and confirm the first of these propositions, namely, That a man cannot entirely abandon himself to the commission of evil, till he has absolutely excluded the apprehension of God from his thoughts.

It is natural for us to express a reverence towards superior characters. Even the men of looser manners do yet impose a willing restraint upon themselves, when they stand before the persons they honour. The rebel puts on a face of loyalty in the presence of his prince; the coward has not the courage to fly in the sight of his general; and where is that presumptuous wretch that would not gladly cast a veil over his offences, when he apprehends himself in the presence of that Being, *who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.* The very apprehension of the presence of God must check the rise of every guilty thought, and keep every tendency to passion in awe.

It is not usual ever for bad minds to put their dark workings in execution till every eye be closed; they tremble at the approach of day, and shun the light they hate, because their deeds are evil. And is it possible that they should shrink at the faint glimmerings of an imperfect light, that they should fly from the presence of a man fallible as themselves, and yet

dare to stand the inspection of that eye, to which the very darkness is no darkness at all; before which all hearts are open, and to which no secrets are hid?

Again: It is observable that when a man has once begun to indulge the dispositions and habits of vice, he gradually withdraws himself from every object which may infer a reproach upon his conduct, or suggest to him the necessity of reforming it.

He deserts the places of public adoration; he declines the society of pious and good men; and suppresses the exertion of every thought that bears upon it any visible stamp of virtue and religion. He guards himself against the apprehension of God, as against a dangerous companion. He endeavours by all possible caution to avoid it, as a discerning spy into his most obscure retreat, the avowed adversary of his most favourite pursuits. He finds himself incapable of advancing one step, while this stands in his way; it opposes his progress, as the armed angel did that of the ambitious prophet, and obstructs the accomplishment of his wicked views.

The conception of God, and an inclination to commit evil, are principles of such direct opposition and contrariety, that they never can in any degree of moral possibility reside at the same time in the same bosom. They must inevitably be destroyed by, and be the destruction of each other. *What concord* (says the Apostle, in a manner which implies the absolute impossibility of what he seems to make a doubt) *What concord, what harmony, what agreement, what union, can there possibly be between Christ and Belial? between piety and profaneness?* No more than between the two most discordant and contradictory existences in nature; between light and darkness: the one can only advance, as the other recedes; the appearance of the night will always bear an exact proportion to the declension of the day.

And as it appears, from this observation, that habitually bad men are obliged to banish the apprehension of God from their minds, as it remonstrates against their evil habits and intentions, and cannot ever be brought by any possible means to concur or coincide with them; so we may observe farther, that when persons who, in the common tenor of their lives, deserve to be ranked among the

number of the good, have been insensibly led into any fault, or folly, by allowing the apprehension of God to slip inadvertently from their thoughts; it is to be observed, I say, that they endeavour earnestly (upon the first return of that apprehension) to divorce themselves from those errors, which they know can never be reconciled to any tolerable conception of the Deity.

It is not to be wondered at, if in so long, and in so intricate a scene of action, as the course of human life, a disposition to indolence should insensibly invade even the best of men. The most noble, the most enlightened minds we read of, have, at certain intervals, undergone a sort of *deliquium* and momentary eclipse; but whatever evil might have insinuated itself during that privation of God's informing spirit, yet at the return of his gracious presence it has vanished away. Though the mists and damps may creep up in the absence of the sun, yet are they instantly dispersed by the light of his countenance.

The evidence therefore of this assertion is equal in those cases where the commission of ill is consequential to an involuntary oblivion of the Deity, and in those where the previous inclination to vice has made it necessary to suppress the remembrance of it. I would be understood to say, that the truth of this proposition, "That a man cannot abandon himself entirely to the commission of evil, till he has absolutely excluded the apprehension of God from his thoughts," is not more evident from the laborious efforts to which men, resolutely bad, are obliged to have recourse, in order to extinguish effectually that apprehension; than it is from the sincere and eager endeavours of men, good in the general, to recover themselves from the failings they have incurred during a temporary and unintended suspension of it.

Upon the whole, you must see, that while men keep up the apprehension of God upon their hearts, they cannot ever become entirely reprobate. A man's belief will only be a continual thorn in his side, while his actions contradict it. We read, it is true, that the very apostate spirits believe, but that they tremble too; and so does every man whose conscience and whose conduct are of different parties. In short—it is not possible for any one to be a true believer and a bad man

long together. He will soon find himself obliged to make a thorough change either in his persuasion or in his practice. —But,

Secondly, When the apprehension of the Deity is once suppressed, a man may be led imperceptibly, by the delusive attraction of error, through each successive degree of impiety, till he arrive at last at a state of absolute insensibility and final impenitence.

While the apprehension of God presides over the mind, it keeps every meaner thought in subjection; it raises a man's ideas to a contempt of baser objects; and controls and regulates his whole procedure. But no sooner is that excluded, than every petty passion, every low desire, breaks out into open act, and usurps by turns the tyranny of the soul.

I think that the mind in this situation may be compared, not unfitly, to a promiscuous assembly of men; who, so long as they have any one person of dignity and authority at their head, move on in an amicable confederacy together, and promote one common end by an agreeable variety of operation. But, that authority being once dissolved, the subordination is lost, and the whole reduced to anarchy and confusion. Each man is ready to assume what no man is willing to concede; and the government entirely unhinged by the multitude of those that would govern.

When this primary restraint, this grand preservative, is once removed, a door is opened to every folly. The bad affections, which were before chained down, are now let loose; and sin, deceitful enough in itself, gains an easy ascendant upon a mind which is willing to be deceived, and which dreads nothing so much as the necessity of subscribing to conviction.

There is a sort of melancholy pleasure in observing by what shallow reasonings, by what poor pretences, men suffer themselves to be cheated out of their virtue! how not only without regret, but even with rapture, they part with a blessing which is become uneasy to their newly-conceived desires!

First, One pretence that is generally made is, "That religion contracts our faculties into narrow bounds; that, in order to enlarge them, it is necessary to

burst her bands asunder, and cast away her cords from us; that every passion has its natural object, and that it is an infringement on natural liberty to restrain the indulgence of them; that, since life is at best so short, the best method of making it longer is to enjoy it; that the severities and rigours which are imposed by religious ordinance, are only the inflictions of politic priests, who (being disabled by age and infirmity) would willingly make atonement for their own transgressions, by laying the severest restrictions on the liberties of others; that religion, in short, is the merest slavery; and that a man denies himself the pleasure which nature has allowed him, who does not give a full scope to the indulgence of every passion."

I allow this to be a very ancient system of practical infidelity; so ancient as to have obtained before the days of Solomon, and is thus beautifully represented in the book of Wisdom—"Our life," say the libertines of that age, "is short and tedious, and in the death of man there is no remedy, neither was any man known to have returned from the grave. For we are born at all adventure, and we shall be hereafter as if we had never been! For the breath in our nostrils is as smoke, and a little spark in the moving of our hearts; which being extinguished, our body shall be turned into ashes, and our spirit shall vanish as the soft air. And our name shall be forgotten in time, and no man shall have our works in remembrance; our life shall pass away as the trace of a cloud, shall be dispersed as a mist that is driven away with the beams of the sun, and overcome with the heat thereof. For our time is a very shadow that passeth away, and after our end there is no returning; for it is fast sealed, so that no man cometh again. Come on, therefore: let us enjoy the good things that are present; let us speedily use the creatures as young men do; let us fill ourselves with costly wine and ointment, and let no flower of the spring pass by us. Let us crown ourselves with rose-buds before they be withered, let none of us go without his part of our voluptuousness, let us leave tokens of our joyfulness in every place; for this is our portion, and our lot is this."

Thus said the voluptuous of those days, in terms too like those of ours; reasoning with themselves, but not aright. For this method of arguing is attended by

two very great and very evident defects.

1. That it deprives its adherents of the pleasures they pursue.

2. That it involves them in the very slavery they pretend to avoid.

First—It is by no means evident (though it has been sometimes insinuated) that religion forbids the enjoyment of any delight which nature and reason allow; and whoever presumes to exceed the bounds prescribed by reason and nature, will be sure to meet the disappointment his presumption deserves. And it is notorious to a degree, that those who pretend to a greater latitude of enjoyment than the rest of mankind, have in fact the least real enjoyment of all. They may hope or boast what they please, of increasing their satisfactions; they are increased like boiling fluids, which are only consuming most when they rise to the highest pitch.

But the man who acts within the prescription of nature and reason, enjoys his happiness by not devouring it; his temperance leaves the true relish upon every appetite, and he improves his pleasures by their diminution.

Secondly, The austerities which are charged upon religion (though religion certainly does (and so does reason too) prescribe some in particular circumstances to curb the irregularity of passion) are trifling, in comparison of the repeated penances, mortifications, and regimen, to which the libertine is reduced, by disappointed passions, a disordered constitution, and an unquiet mind. It is experimentally evident, that men in general subject themselves to greater penalties in order to undo the effects of their vices, than would have been sufficient at first to have entirely prevented them. And it is universally allowed, that no tyranny is equal to that of a predominant and overruling passion, which commands a man at one time to go, and he goes; at another, to come, and he comes; at a third, to do this, and he does it. It breaks in upon his retirement; attacks him at the most unseasonable hour; supercedes the efficacy of his best resolutions; and rules absolutely, without control, and without competition:—so that this scheme of liberty is in truth nothing less than what it professes; while a subjection to reason and religion will be found to be the only true and the only perfect freedom.

Secondly

Secondly, Another deceit that men are apt to put upon themselves is, "That the sins they commit are so inconsiderable, that they will certainly be overlooked by the eye of Infinite Mercy; that they make such short incursions into the ways of wickedness, as to leave their retreat secure whenever they please; and that they are in no danger of falling into any flagrant or presumptuous act of evil." A notion thus more flattering to men's passions, and for that very reason more fatal to their virtue, perhaps, than any other. For persons who do deliberately persist in any degree of evil, every degree of which is forbid under the severest penalty by the same Divine authority, are not objects of God's mercy, but of his just resentment. And their danger is equal to their presumption; for that opinion of the inconsiderableness of their sins, which first led them out of the road of virtue, will encourage them to go on a little still, and still a little farther, till (by neglecting to observe every small advance) they fall insensibly by little and little. They begin but with small quantities, who are inured afterwards to immoderate draughts of the most scalding liquors; and men are brought (by this unexpected gradation in vice) to commit crimes without reluctance, who would at first have startled at the very mention of their names. The progress of wickedness in men of this persuasion is something like the imperceptible growth of plants, in which, though the motion be so slow as to elude the discernment of the eye in any instantaneous act, yet when we look back upon them (after some intermission of observation) we perceive an amazing and almost incredible increase.

This is so fatal a deceit, that one would almost be induced to think, that it had been better for some men to have fallen immediately into a flagrant breach of duty (upon their first revolt from virtue) than to have crept on in the commission of what are usually called inconsiderable sins. And for this reason—There is something so shocking to a mind (that retains any sense of God and goodness) in the reflexions which succeed the commission of any greater crime, that a man recoils from it with the utmost horror and detestation, and is often carried back-

ward to greater degrees of virtue by the very violence with which he fell from it.

But, on the other hand, while a man continues to flatter himself that the sins he commits are trifling and venial, he is gradually amused into an increase of wickedness and guilt. He goes on step by step, without perceiving the progression, and is deluded into his destruction, by an opinion of his security.

And this brings on the last illusion in which sin is apt to involve the human mind; which is this—When the persons who have thought themselves so secure, begin to look calmly back, and discover the unthought-of advances they have made in vice, they stand amazed; and conclude it as impossible for them now to return, as they did before to have proceeded so far. Their presumption is turned into despair; a situation of mind which precludes all endeavours after virtue and happiness; which generally ends in the dissolution of every religious principle, and of every moral tie; which leaves men at liberty to work all impurity with an insatiable appetite, and to run every length of evil, without restraint and beyond recovery.

I have now gone through what I proposed; and have endeavoured to convince you, that men can never become irrecoverably bad, till they have shook off their dependance upon God. But that, after that dependance has once ceased, they may be (and generally are) led on by false pretences of pleasure and liberty, and by flattering presumptions in favour of their sins, till they become quite hardened in their practices and desperately wicked.

You see then how extremely cautious we ought to be, to prevent in ourselves that *evil heart of unbelief*, in departing from the living God; how absolutely necessary it is for us to exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of us should be *hardened by the deceitfulness of sin*.

SERMON IV.

Sudden Prosperity fatal to Religion.

DEUT. vi. 10, 11, 12.

When the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not, when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the Lord.

WHEN the great law-giver and leader of the Jews had brought his people within the reach of that country which had seemed to fly before them for forty years; when they were now ready to enter upon the possession of the promises, and their hearts, which had fainted under the delay of their hope, were beginning to exult in the certainty of their success, he seems to have been affected with a sensible concern at the expression of their joy; he was apprehensive for their morals in this reverse of their fortune; he considered that spirits (like theirs) which had been so greatly dejected in one extreme, would in all probability be as highly elated in the other; and that their elevation might be attended even with more fatal consequences than their distress. He saw, or feared he saw, that when they should be intoxicated with the delusive sweetness of their better fate, they would punish themselves irreparably with the blessings of Providence, and make their prosperity a prelude to their destruction.

This reflection touched him near: he was not content to have brought them to the possession of their Canaan; he was desirous to perpetuate it to them and their posterity. He knew that his own commission was expiring, that thus far he was to go and no farther; he determined therefore to supply the want of his presence, by a legacy of his instructions. It was then he meditated and delivered those admirable directions, which if they had observed with as much care as he recommended them with earnestness, Israel might have been still a people, Jerusalem have now stood, and their temple remained unto this very day. One of the

principal of his instructions is contained in the words I first read to you, which from the nature of his design, and without violence to his expression, suggest these four useful observations:

First, That a just and constant sense of the Supreme Being, is the best security for a man's virtue, expressed in his admonition, *not to forget the Lord.*

Secondly, That this sense is often much effaced, sometimes absolutely lost, in a state of ease and affluence, strongly implied in the words, *when thou shalt have eaten and be full, then beware.*

Thirdly, That such a state lays us under stronger obligations to retain and improve that sense upon our minds, which I think clearly intimated in these expressions—*great and goodly cities which thou didst not build, and houses full of all good things which thou filledst not, vineyards and olive-trees which thou plantedst not*: after the enumeration of every blessing, he repeats this consideration, *that they were not of their own acquiring.*

Fourthly, That the strong obligations on one side, and temptations on the other, exact the utmost caution from us in the discovery and application of those means that are most likely to preserve it—*Then beware.*

Let us consider the truth of the first proposition, namely,

That a just sense of the Supreme Being is the best security for a man's virtue. I say, a just sense, because (it must be allowed that) wrong apprehensions of the Deity have generally had a very unhappy influence on the interests of virtue; as is evident to every one who compares the religion and manners of the heathen world. Men usually endeavour to conform themselves to the character of that Being which is the object of their worship. The transition, therefore, was most easy from the adoration of beasts to the imitation of them; and what godlike virtues could reasonably be expected from men, when a calf was the model of their perfection? But the cause of reason was then sunk to its lowest ebb, when every passion which was a dishonour to the human nature was translated to the divine; when immodesty, intemperance, and inhumanity, were the sacrifices with which their gods were well pleased; when every temple was dedicated to a vice, every act of devotion was performed at the expence of a virtue; their whole religion

was an introduction to immorality ; and piety with them was but another word for prophaneness.

This was probably the reason why Moses was so particularly solicitous to suppress all personal representations of the Deity, through his whole œconomy ; (not that painting and sculpture were in themselves so abominable arts, as deserved to be guarded against by an express prohibition, but) he knew very well, that the people would naturally borrow their idea of God from the representations they saw of him, and that the idea of their god would be the measure of their morality. This we have seen has constantly been the case in all the corrupted notions of God, and we shall find, that it will as necessarily be so, in the more pure and perfect conceptions of him.

You believe (for instance) that there is one God, eternal, invisible, in whose mind no passion of impurity or ill-will, no unkind or unchaste affection, has any place ; who is for ever happy in the perpetual love and exercise of reason and truth ; who made all things by his power, and preserves them by his wisdom ; who formed mankind for happiness, and is daily conducting them towards it, by the amazing and inscrutable dispensations of Nature and Providence.

This is an idea which is congenial to the clear and uncorrupted understandings of men ; it fills the mind with admiration and delight, and excites us to imitate what we cannot but approve ; it inspires us with an honest ardour, to pursue at least what we cannot overtake ; and to be as perfect in our little sphere, as our Father which is in heaven is perfect in the highest. No man upon earth, who reflects upon the sanctity of God with any tolerable degree of seriousness or consistency, can allow himself in any indecency of thought or action ; the consideration of his equity must deter us from injustice ; the idea of his benevolence induce us to humanity.

But the apprehension of his constant and universal presence is a very considerable accession to the cause of virtue. The approbation of all good men is as agreeable to the generous mind as the most fragrant odour is to the sense—'tis a natural and virtuous incentive to the practice of virtue. And if this be so strong a motive when we consider men

alone as the spectators of our actions, how much stronger must the influence of it be when we look up to the approbation of angels and applause of God !

There are few things that have contributed more to the extent of vice, than the hope of secrecy ; which vanishes at the very apprehension of a Being who seeth in secret. What hope of secrecy can he entertain, who knows that he is no more alone in his solitude than in the midst of society, nor less visible in darkness than at the noon of day ? Nay, who knows that his very heart is laid open to its inmost recess, with all the imperfect materials of his thoughts, before they are connected or wrought into a design ?

But our idea of the Deity stops not here ; we consider him, not barely as a spectator of our actions, but as a judge of them too : and he must be an insolent offender indeed who will dare to commit a crime in the sight of him, who he knows will judge him, who he is sure will condemn him for it. The very form of our laws seems to look upon this as an impossibility, when it imputes the guilt of every greater criminal to his "not having had the fear of God before his eyes."

The hope of reward and fear of punishment add fresh vigour to the cause of virtue. How insensible a man must he be, who cannot be allured to the practice of virtue by the hope of immortal happiness—abandoned to the commission of ill, who cannot be deterred from committing it by the terror of eternal misery !

You see then what a direct influence a just and constant sense of the Supreme Being must necessarily have upon the manners of men. The contemplation of his perfections, the awe of his presence, the hope of his reward, and fear of his punishment, are so many several admonitions to us to walk before him and be perfect. It is in vain for a man to talk of his faith, when he is defective in his works ; what every one does, is a demonstration of what he believes. Our actions are nothing but the visible representations of our thoughts, and you may read the articles of a man's faith in the conduct of his life.

Upon the whole, it seems abundantly evident that a constant and awful sense of God must be universally attended with the

the practice of every thing that is good, and that there is in fact no difference between the ungodly and the wicked man.

Secondly, This sense is often much effaced, sometimes absolutely lost, in a state of ease and affluence.

The complexion of a man's mind does, I know not how, insensibly adapt itself to the circumstances of his fortune. It is almost incredible how great an alteration in one is sometimes instantly produced by the least variation in the other; inso-much that one shall scarce know a person to be the same—nay, we even say, in common speech, that he hardly knows himself. Such uncertain inconstant creatures are we, whose strongest resolutions are so easily shifted about by every breath of fortune!

We may, perhaps, recollect instances (if we can instruct ourselves without injuring the characters of others) where persons who have adorned a lower station of life with an humble reverence for God, and an hearty good-will towards men, have upon a sudden advancement left every virtue behind them. It seems to be the unhappy privilege of prosperity, to rob us of that which was dearer to the royal prophet than thousands of gold and silver. The observation of Moses has its foundation in nature, is evident to experience, and confirmed by a greater than Moses, who tells us, how difficult it is for those who trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God; and we find how difficult it is for those who have them, not to trust in them.

When we are under any immediate pressure of affliction, when we are despised and deserted by men, we look upon God as a present help in trouble—but that exigence is no sooner over, and we have recovered the ease of our former condition, than we begin to see him at a greater distance. We no longer call to Heaven for that satisfaction which we can now find from earth, but depend upon the second cause for that support, which ought only to be expected, which can never be attained, but from the first. We begin to fancy ourselves established even beyond the reach of Providence, or the possibility of change. We say in our hearts, *I shall not be moved, I can never be in adversity.* This vain imagination swells into pride, which, as the Psalmist justly observes, is an infallible

cause of impiety; the wicked, through the pride of his heart, will not seek God, neither is God in all his thoughts.

There is something in the very nature of ease, which is apt to enervate the mind, and introduce a languid effeminacy into all its faculties. The senses, by an habitual indulgence, gain ground upon the understanding, and usurp the province of reason, which must inevitably decline in proportion as the sensual affections prevail; the spirit becomes less willing, as the flesh grows more weak; we sink into an indolent oblivion of our Maker, and fall amongst the number of those who (as the Apostle expresses it) are *lovers of pleasures, more than lovers of God.* We are led by a certain gaiety of spirit (which is insensibly inspired by an affluent circumstance) into an endless variety of amusements, which, being innocent in their beginnings, are more likely in their end to draw us into that which is less so, and imperceptibly betray us into a forgetfulness of God.—The harp and the viol, the tabret and pipe and wine are in our feasts; but, in the mean time, we regard not the work of the Lord, nor consider the operation of his hand.

Luxury and intemperance are almost unavoidable consequences of levity and indolence, and as fruitful fountains of infidelity. The fumes of excess throw a cloud upon our better thoughts, and extinguish the little spark of divinity within us. It was even a proverbial expression amongst the heathen, “That without eating and drinking, the fires of their impurest goddesses would be quite extinct;” which is perfectly agreeable to the account given by the historian of the people of God, *they eat and drank before they rose up to play*, that is, their luxury and intemperance preceded their idolatry.

Thus you see how every circumstance of a prosperous condition conspires to steal from us a little of our religion; the irresolution, the pride, the ease, the levity, the luxury, that attend it, are daily and hourly depriving us of something that is good; they incline us less and less to retain the Creator in our knowledge, till they have reduced us at last to the miserable situation of those who live without God, and without goodness, in the world.

It is obvious to observe here, that as every

every corruption in our principles is followed by proportionate decay in our practice, so (on the other hand) every corruption in our practice is attended with an equal decay in our principles; from whence it appears, that religion and virtue are inseparably united: they go hand in hand, they support alternately and are supported by each other; they must flourish and fall together; *they are lovely in their lives, and in their deaths they cannot be divided.*

Thirdly, A state of ease and affluence, as it tempts us strongly to lose, so it lays us under greater obligations to retain and improve that sense of God upon our minds.

It is one of the first and strongest principles of humanity, to make the best return we can to every act of kindness; and the force of the principle must rise upon us, in proportion, as those acts increase in number or degree. He, therefore, who enjoys the greatest advantages from Heaven, is obliged to make the most sincere and most constant acknowledgment for them.

You (to whom the words of the text are literally applicable) who inhabit great and goodly cities which you did not build, who inherit houses full of all good things which you did not fill; you whose country presents to you the purest springs without the toil of digging, and whose commerce supplies you with the produce of vineyards and olive-trees, which were planted by another hand; you who are born to such possessions as many by the labour of a whole life are not able to acquire; you whose fortunes seem to be showered upon you directly from Heaven, while others are forced by the sweat of their brows to raise them from the earth; as you are blessed with higher degrees of the bounties of God, so are you more eminently obliged to preserve a stronger sense of them. Your duty increases with the eminence of your station, and your obligations to it are multiplied by the number of your advantages.

Fourthly, You have now seen, "that proper conceptions of God are the most probable means of making men good, and of keeping them so." You have seen likewise, "that a state of plenty and indolence is always apt to obscure, and sometimes absolutely suppress, those conceptions, notwithstanding the stronger

ties a man has, in such a state, to preserve them." I shall now point out to you, in the last place, some of those means which seem most likely to preserve and improve those conceptions upon our minds. And I think there can be no better than those which Moses recommends to the Israelites in the words immediately preceding the text.—*The words, says he, which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children; and thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down and when thou risest up.*

I shall invert their order, and begin with the morning. A man that thinks at all can hardly forbear (when he finds himself awake without the act of his own will) to address his thanks to the Power who raised him from that helpless (though friendly) oppression of his thought and motion; and is it not natural, when you compose yourselves to a state that carries so strong a resemblance of death in it, to send up one prayer to Him who is the author and preserver of life? When you thus begin and end your day, when you thus open your morning and close your evening, you cannot absolutely forget the Lord: especially if (in the second place) you make him the subject of your conversation too. But we seem to banish the name of God from our discourse, or only introduce it in such a manner as we are forbid to use it. If we did but converse upon the nature of God with half the warmth we usually do upon more trifling matters, we should not easily forget the Lord.

The third direction is, to teach the commandments of God to your children; but a man cannot well teach that to another, of which he is ignorant himself. And every time you endeavour to imprint a sense of God upon the minds of your children, you must necessarily make so strong an impression of it upon your own, that you can never be able to forget the Lord.

There is one particular institution of our religion, which seems immediately calculated to make us not forget the Lord.—*Do this as oft as you do it, in remembrance of Him.*

These seem to be the most likely means to keep a sense of God alive upon your minds.

minds. Such a sense of God is the best preservative of your virtue, and you will find the practice of virtue to be the most solid foundation for happiness—present and future.

S E R M O N V.

The Sinner's Hope of Impunity groundless.

PSALM CXIX. 120.

My flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments.

IT is no small part of prudence, to proportion one's fear to his danger, and to restrain our hopes within the possibility, at least, of success. From hence a man draws a double security against those evils which exist only in imagination; and against those which are not less real, because we may be weak enough to fancy them otherwise.

It is equally weak (though in some cases not equally pernicious) to live in perpetual apprehension of ills which have no real existence in nature, and which consequently we can never suffer, as it is to have no apprehension at all of those evils, which do not only in reality exist, but which must also inevitably overtake us.

Perhaps some of the greatest evils to which this little life of ours is evidently exposed, and with which the more lasting one, whither we are hastening, may possibly be embarrassed, are in a great measure owing to our not being sufficiently guarded in this point, are in a great measure owing to our ill-grounded hope, or to our as unreasonable fear. It is the business, therefore, and will be the concern of every wise man, to examine thoroughly the objects of his hope and fear, that he may neither create to himself a pain which nature never intended for him, nor incur a punishment which Providence had given him a power of avoiding.

Every wise man (I say) will guard himself against these inconveniencies, in all his designs, in all his views, and in that most which most concerns him, the immediate result of his moral conduct, the final issue of his good or evil actions; and yet we see, that people in general, are as

little determined what may reasonably be hoped, and what ought reasonably to be feared, in this most important of all inquiries, as they are in those which are of infinitely less concern; terrifying themselves on one hand with imaginary dangers, flattering themselves on the other hand with an exemption from miseries which cannot be avoided.

How far these errors may be owing to the different constitutions of our minds, how far to our not attending so seriously and so frequently as we ought, to the clearing up a matter of that importance, and how far to the perverse application of those sacred writings, which alone are able to set that matter in its proper light, I shall not now inquire. In part, I believe, to every one of the three. They seem to me to be founded in constitution, to be improved by inattention, and to receive a seeming sanction from ill-grounded interpretations of the word of truth. But be this as it may, the fact is evident; men do in general entertain most unreasonable hopes and fears with regard to the good or evil consequences of their actions, with respect to the final dispensation of the just Judge of heaven and earth.

Some considering their best actions as the objects of his indignation; others imagining their worst to be the objects of his compassion. One man represents him to himself of so unrelenting, so implacable, so vindictive a disposition, as leaves no room for his mercy; another paints him of so benevolent, so compassionate, so complying a nature, as must exclude at once both his justice and his wisdom. This conceives him to be unwilling to pardon the slightest offence; while that looks upon him as incapable of punishing the greatest.

As I conceive the latter of these to be the most prevailing, as well as the most pernicious opinion of the two, I shall endeavour (for the present) to shake the false foundations of hope in those who extend it beyond what reason encourages, beyond what revelation allows, by inquiring what just grounds a bad man has for his expectation of final impunity; what shew of reason he can have to hope that God will suffer his sin to go at length unpunished; or rather to evince, that, while he persists in his sin, he has but too just reason to tremble for fear of God; he

has but too just reason to be afraid of his judgments.

I know but of two ways of coming at any tolerable knowledge of the divine proceedings with respect to vice in futurity. The first is, to observe how he uses to proceed with regard to it here; the second, in what manner he declares he will proceed with respect to it hereafter.

The one is a probable argument, founded upon this most reasonable presumption, that the future proceedings of the Almighty will be, in some degree, at least similar to the methods he pursues at present.

The other a certain one, depending upon this infallible truth, that the dealings of God with men will inevitably correspond with his declarations to them.

And to whichever side of these we turn our view, the prospect will not be extremely advantageous on the part of the sinner.

If we take our estimate of the consequences of vice in the next life from what we experience of its effects in this, it will be no strong inducement to us to continue in the commission of it: the very course and constitution of nature reclaims against it. One part of its punishment is inseparable from its existence; for every vicious disposition is armed, in some degree, against the person who indulges it, even from its first motions through all its succeeding operations upon the mind.

The truth of this fact will appear beyond contradiction to any one who gives the least attention to what passes within himself, or to the visible effects of each passion upon any other man, while he remains under this unhappy influence, in the instances of lust, envy, anger, revenge, and all that legion of devils (for they are many) which usurp the dominion of the soul when the residence of the divine spirit is excluded from it.

What has been strongly said of one, may, with no great impropriety, be applied to all, that the most inhuman tyrants never invented an engine, which could give such exquisite torture to humanity as they can do. It is true of envy in particular, and of the rest in proportion, that it extends the mind upon a rack, till the very frame of the body gives way to the agitations of the heart.

Amongst the dispositions to do ill, we may reckon the want of inclination to do

any thing. I look upon idleness as the most intolerable burthen in the world; no fatigue of employment can equal the uneasiness of having none; for in this there is a peculiar difficulty: when the man of business is tired, a cessation from it is his refreshment; but the idle man can expect no relief, for his very rest is his incumbrance.

These are the hidden seeds of evil, which, like sparks of fire under ground, first eat their way within, and, when they are ripe for an eruption, burst forth to the horror and confusion of all about them.

It is clear, then, that the passions which are subversive of general good, are attended with sensations of pain in the minds of individuals.

Again: The actions which flow from these passions are, in their consequences, injurious to the persons who commit them.

Every session lays fresh confirmation of this truth before our eyes, and supplies us with tragical accounts of wretches, who have been trapped in the work of their hands, and whose wickedness is fallen on their own heads. There may be crimes, indeed, which creep, as it were, under the law, and criminals who have raised themselves above the reach of its execution: but in cases like these, the censure of mankind is a supplement to the law; and when the property and the person escape, we lay the fine upon the reputation. This is always a considerable, and has sometimes proved an unsupportable penalty.

But, if this could either be endured or evaded, there is yet another in reserve, that will be felt; and that the vicious man may be made thoroughly sensible, how impossible it is for him to escape justice, his own conscience obliges him, when he has been screened from every other quarter, to inflict it upon himself.

There is a course of action, resulting from the predominance of one ill-conducted passion, which insinuates itself into unwary minds, under the name and expectation of pleasure.

As the advocates for latitude on this head are many in number, I shall just glance at a practice, which the delicacy of our religion forbids us even to name; and, as they are generally such as, excluding all other laws, make their appeal unto nature, unto nature let them go.

I. Na-

1. Nature then will inform them, that affection is weakened by a wandering inclination to a multiplicity of objects, which is heightened and improved by being restrained to one.

As the rays of light have but a loose effect, when scattered carelessly abroad, compared with the more intense force they acquire by being contracted in the glass.

2. Nature again will cry aloud against the hardness of that man's heart, who can expose the person to whom he pretends affection, and the offspring to whom he owes protection, to circumstances of disadvantage, which no penitence on his part, no efforts on theirs, can ever efface.

In this case, his very pride will inflict on him a punishment, which he had escaped from his humanity.

I say nothing of the expence that attends this practice, which is such as the greatest fortune can barely support, and an inevitable destruction to a small one.

We have two very capital pictures left us by an excellent hand, of the principal heroes in these pursuits, very proper for the cabinet of a modern libertine.

1. An ox going to the slaughter; a heavy, stupid, well-fed animal, led or driven, every one can see whither, but itself.

2. A bird hastening to the snare; a giddy, foolish, fluttering creature, hurried swiftly on, perhaps decoyed by the song of another, pleased with the prospect of a companion, till it finds itself in a cage.

3. The dart piercing through the liver needs no explication. In short, experience adds weight to the authority by which we are informed, that no unlawful enjoyment of sense whatever can equal the heart-felt satisfaction of having abstained from it.

Besides, these pleasures belong but to one part of our life: they are not decent, indeed, at any time; but there is an age which least becomes them. Suppose, then, the mind to have been so long engaged in the service of the body, that it shall not be able to emancipate itself so soon as it ought: this is far from being a wild supposition; and this is a case that must be attended with very unpleasant circumstances.

But I hasten from this particular, to consider an objection or two, that has been made to the general argument.

It is a mistaken notion of many, that because the punishment does not in all cases immediately pursue the crime, it never will overtake it in any. This the wisest of men observed in his days to be an encouragement to sin; and we cannot but observe, that it still continues to be so, in ours; because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully bent in them to do evil. A very superficial view of things will serve to evince the falseness of this judgment. For nothing is more evident than that God, having established certain fixed and standing laws for the regulation of the universe, does not interpose judicially but in very extraordinary instances, leaving the transgressors of those laws to the natural effects of their folly, which are not less certain, but more fatal, from the slowness of their operation.

The bad effects of vice, though they begin to operate from the instant of its commission, do yet, in many respects, operate slowly and imperceptibly, being confirmed by degrees, and acquiring new strength as they advance.

There is still another objection which has been frequently made to the present administration of Providence with respect to vice—and that is, that it is in general more successful in this life than virtue.

This is indeed a formidable objection, and has raised many scruples in the minds, even of inspired writers. But there are considerations which will take off the edge, even of this objection. For, in the first place, I think there is some reason to suspect the truth of the fact. There have, I grant, been many eminent instances of base and infamous men, who have been raised to the highest pitch of human grandeur: but have not the most unblemished characters likewise been raised as high?

In all the kingdoms of the earth, there are examples of the best of men ready to match those that may be brought of the worst.

But supposing the fact, it deserves to be remembered, that the happiness, the real satisfaction of life, does not consist absolutely in the success of it; that though the vicious man does often succeed to the riches and honours of this world, his success is seldom, if ever, owing directly to his vices; that the worst of men have

some

Some good qualities, and that these must, according to the settled order of things, have their good effects; and that, when the bad man has succeeded, by fraud or violence, to the utmost height of temporal prosperity, he sickens in the midst of it, and would willingly part with all his honours to be unconscious of the methods by which he attained them.

Let us look a little upon this mighty man, exalted, we will suppose, on his throne, clothed with all the externals of human grandeur, and extolled by sycophants as a god. Is this the object of your envy? Do you call him happy? You mistake him quite. He has a monitor within him that will not allow him to believe his flatterers; his violences, his excesses, his murders, rise up against him; and, like the first murderer on earth, he fancies every man he meets is watching an opportunity to slay him. The punishment he deserves he always fears, and more than feels it in the apprehension. The very guards which were intended for his security, he looks upon as his executioners—he dreads his enemies, suspects his friends, abhors himself. He lives in a succession of fears and horrors, and dies by the hands of his servants, his kinsmen, or perhaps his own.

And which of us now would be this envied man? Would the poorest of us all quit his innocence and poverty, his happy unmolested poverty, for all this grandeur, attended with a thousand villainies, a thousand dangers, and ten thousand fears?

It appears, then, that vice, even in its most advantageous situation, is laid under so many restraints and disadvantages, even in the present imperfect state of trial, as to afford us a strong presumption, that it can meet with no agreeable reception in the future day of recompense.

And what we find thus obscurely delineated in the book of Nature, we read still more clearly expressed in the book of Revelation. The declarations of God on this head are as plain as they are powerful; they are as easy to be understood as it is impossible they should be avoided.

In them we find, that neither the triumphs of the wicked man, nor the distresses of the virtuous one, shall endure for ever. *That there will be a day in which God will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom he hath appointed;—that he will then render to every man*

according to his deeds—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul that doeth evil. That the wicked shall go into everlasting punishment, as surely, for the same reason and from the same authority, as the righteous shall inherit everlasting life.

Hath he said, and shall he not do it? hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? The threatenings and the promises of God rest upon the same foundation; his veracity is equally concerned to fulfil one as the other; and as certainly as the good man shall be rewarded for his virtue, so certainly shall the bad one be punished for his apostacy and rebellion.

These are the evident declarations of God relating to his future proceedings with wicked men, which are entirely consistent with his present dealings with us; in which we find that every evil passion, and its subsequent action, is immediately attended with painful sensations.

These sensations were wisely annexed by the Author of nature to every action which might prove prejudicial to the bodies or to the minds of men, to their present or future happiness. They were intended as gentle admonitions to us, to abstain from those acts, which, as they begin in pain, must end in death. When we persist in our ill intentions, notwithstanding these tacit remonstrances of nature and reason, we undergo the severest censure from our own judgments—we stand convicted within ourselves, of having transgressed the law of our own nature, and of having rebelled against the Author of it.

This is a grievous disease, and therefore we seek for means to palliate it.

Sometimes, by racking the brain to invent arguments against a future state.

This is indeed a miserable refuge, a most uncomfortable consolation; for a man to sit down in earnest to deceive himself; to cheat himself of a hope which every wise man in every age has endeavoured to reduce to certainty.

But, alas! he shall not be able to impose upon his reason, by all his sophistry. For let us allow him, all that the boldest libertine can demand, that all the arguments which have been offered in favour of a future state, are founded in probability only; let us allow him, that there has been no certain demonstration of it.

I am sure there has been, there can be

none against it; and while there is but a bare probability for it, there always will be a rational ground for fear. He shall fear then what he does not believe; nay his very fear shall make him believe, and his belief shall make him tremble.

But he will say, perhaps, if there be a God, he must be infinitely good; I believe he must; I allow he is; but his goodness leadeth to repentance. The penitents are the objects of his mercy, the obstinate of his justice. However, since he cannot escape his justice, he will depend upon his mercy. Upon whose? upon the mercy of that God, whose authority he has despised, whose laws he has transgressed, whose name he has blasphemed, and whose existence he has endeavoured to thrust out of the universe. It is an uncertain and unsafe dependance. Can he, *who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*, be so irresolute in his purposes as not to punish it? It can never be.

But for any thing that we know (and by what has been already observed, it seems more than probable that) the future punishment of vice may be as natural a consequence of its commission, as any necessary effect of its cause; and then we may conclude from what God does already, what it is reasonable to expect he will do hereafter. Does he interpose by a miracle to suppress the fever which you have brought upon yourself by your folly; or to support the constitution which is decayed by your intemperance?

If not, why should it be imagined that he shall change the course of nature hereafter, in favour of one who has already subverted it in opposition to him?

These are broken reeds; upon which, if a man lean, they shall pierce into his hand.

Driven from these subterfuges, the sinner is left naked and open to the consciousness of his guilt, and to the dread of its consequences; the terrors of the Lord set themselves in array against him, and he sees that it is as unavoidable as it is dreadful to fall into the hands of the living God.

What shall he now do? whither shall he fly for succour? or where shall he seek for refuge? Shall he go to his past life? It reproaches him with his crimes. Shall he turn towards the future? It threatens him with punishment.

He can find no joy, no pleasing recol-

lection behind—no hope, no flattering expectation before; he looks backward with remorse, and forward with confusion. Distraction presses him on one hand, and despair meets him on the other.

His thoughts are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt; his flesh trembleth for fear of God, and he is afraid of his judgments.

O consider this, ye that forget God, lest he pluck you away, and there be none to deliver you. Consider in this your day the things that belong to your peace, before they are hid for ever from your eyes: which, that we may all do, God of his infinite mercy grant, through the merits of Christ. To him be glory, &c.

S E R M O N VI.

Reflexion on past Errors, the Ground of future Caution.

PSALM cxix. 59, 60.

I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies; I made haste and delayed not to keep thy commandments.

THE person who makes this declaration is David, that well-known king of Israel, whose eminent and illustrious virtues raised him to very high instances of God's distinguished favour and friendship; whose not less famous defect from decency and humanity, in two glaring acts of sensuality and oppression, had almost entirely excluded him in his weaker hours from those glorious testimonies of Divine approbation which had so constantly attended his better life. The psalm from whence the words are extracted seems, from the whole tenor of it, to have been thrown together at the time when he was under the deepest conviction of his folly, and the severest sense of God's displeasure. Remorse for the consciousness of the foul facts; regret for the loss of God's favour, augmented by the open reproaches of his enemies, and the not less galling, though more gentle, reproofs of his friends, are expressed throughout in the most affecting strains of real penitence. The painful recollection of the pleasures he had long found in the paths of virtue, and in the consciousness of God's protection, embittered now by the anguish he felt from contrary pursuits and other apprehensions, make

make him break out into a strong encomium on the happiness of those who had never deviated from their original state of religion and virtue; into plain confessions of his own guilt and shame; into moving relations of the undeserved and implacable resentments of his adversaries; into warm representations of his former integrity and zeal; and into repeated declarations of his fixed resolution to regulate with more care his future conduct.

The whole hymn seems to have been uttered in that natural and agreeable confusion, in which one may easily suppose a mind sensible and honest in the main to have expressed itself, after the tumultuous sallies of vicious passion had given it leave to open its eyes, and see the wretched exchange it had made, from the peace and complacency in its virtuous conduct, to the insupportable compunctions of vice, and the altered aspect of a once friendly, now offended, God.

"Blessed," says he, "are the undelivered in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed indeed (I once felt it with joy, with sorrow I repeat it now) are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with their whole heart. Oh! that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! then should I not feel the shame which now oppresses me, when I had respect unto all thy commandments! My soul cleaveth unto the dust, it melteth for heaviness; it is continually in my hand; I am afflicted very much! I confess that, before thou didst make me sensible of my folly in the mercy of thy judgments, I did go astray like a sheep that is lost. But though this be too true, yet against thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight:—nevertheless the proud have had me in derision; they have forged a lie against me, though the truth was enough for them to have said; they have dealt perversely with me without a cause; my persecutors and mine enemies are many in number, and their quality not inconsiderable, for princes have sat and spoke against me. But do thou consider mine affliction, and deliver me; plead my cause, and deliver me; for I have from my infancy rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, I have adhered to them; make me to go again in the path of thy commandments, for therein have I delighted, and will delight: I will run

that way when thou shalt enlarge my heart.

"Though my ways have been such as were never agreeable in thy sight, nor indeed long so in my own: though I have been inadvertently surprised into evil, and have run those lengths in it I never expected to have gone; yet as soon as my awakening reason would give me leave to reflect, as soon as I recovered power enough to think on my ways, I turned; immediately and without hesitation turned my feet unto thy testimonies,—nay, with an eager and precipitant joy, I returned, I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments."

These were the reflections of that man after God's own heart, when he became sensible of the error of his ways, and discovered the folly and danger of his past transgressions. The false light of delusive passion had drawn him insensibly from the paths of virtue; but the returning dawn of reason shewed him the misery of pursuing those crooked ways, and put him upon exerting all his endeavours in order to recover his former course.

The ways, therefore, on which he thought, were those evil ways into which he had been hurried by the strength of passion; on which he reflected so seriously and closely, as not only to convince himself of the necessity of returning to a sincere obedience, but of proceeding immediately to act in such a manner as was naturally consequent on such a conviction.

So that my design, in this discourse, is not to recommend and enforce that general duty of reflexion and consideration, which all men should, and which all prudent and wise men do apply to the conduct of their lives, to guide their feet in the ways of virtue and happiness; but particularly to encourage and incite those who have once deviated from the way of righteousness, to endeavour their own recovery, as David did; to make use of those painful sensations, which providentially follow the commission of evil; to bring their minds to such a sincere abhorrence and detestation of their vices, and to such dreadful apprehensions of their consequences, as may carry them instantly back again to practise virtue, and fix them immoveably in the practice of it.

It is true, the consideration of our moral state is a duty that derives its obligation, and should take its beginning, from the first dawns of our reason. To reflect what and where we are; what business we have to do, and what time allowed to do it; whither we are going, and what account is to be made; to what dangers we are likely to be exposed, and how we may most probably consult our safety, should be the first suggestions of a mind conscious of its own freedom, and apprehensive of some future reckoning; reflexions, which if they were to begin where it is reasonable to expect they should, and be carried on with the different circumstances of our being, would entirely, or in a great measure at least, prevent that infinity of errors into which we see the deluded race of mortals perpetually falling, and make all those efforts unnecessary, which are now hardly sufficient to extricate them from their dangers. If this were the case, happy would be the condition of humanity! the very necessity of instruction would be superseded by the natural application of our faculties, and reformation itself become needless, when error should be thus stifled in its birth. Happy indeed the man, who should be thus early sensible of his situation and circumstances, thus resolute to pursue, thus uniform in attaining, the ends of both. But since this is not generally, if ever, the case, in our present depraved and defective state; since want of all, or of proper instruction in some, and predominant passion overbearing the influence of all information in others, preclude this heavenly scene; since offences must and do come, I esteem him not unfortunate who can make that use of those he has committed himself, to improve his future conduct; who can draw to much good out of now unavoidable evil, as to raise the foundation of his virtues upon the sense of his failings, and convert the conviction of his follies to the promotion and advancement of real wisdom.

I cannot, I think, be misunderstood to intimate, I would not be thought to imagine, that any sincerity of repentance, how early, how intense soever, can be comparable to a perfect and uniform integrity of life, or that the most earnest endeavour to rise again can be equal to the merit of having never fallen. All

that I intend is, what is evident to frequent observation, that men have sometimes drawn such degrees of caution from their own, as well as from others' inadvertencies, as have thrown a singular circumspection over the succeeding parts of their character, and have rendered them more eminent examples of real virtue, than they might possibly have been if they had never erred.

This I take to have been the case of David, in the instance before us.

His crimes were great indeed, and grievous, and stand recorded as lasting monuments of human infirmity, to latest ages: but, while we fix our attention on these glaring blemishes of his moral character, let us not overlook his hearty, though not early conviction, his contrition, his disquiet, his tears, his prayers, his vows, his resolution to recover himself, and his actual recovery in such a continued series of unintermitting penitence and piety, as equal, in my opinion, if not exceed, the unmeaning innocence of many others; and I make this observation entirely for the sake of those who may be apt (as humble minds are apt to do) to despond upon the recollection of their past miscarriages, by shewing what excellent uses may be made of them; checking at the same time the presumption of others, by representing, from the example before us, what instant, what ardent, what eminent efforts, must be made, if we hope to repair effectually those ruinous breaches in our souls.

The first thing then that must be done by him who is willing to make his past transgressions the instrument of his future virtues, is, to think on his ways. This, in some measure, it will be impossible for him not to do. Though the violence and impetuosity of passion may for a while suppress the voice of conscience, it will most certainly find a time to speak; it will suggest to him the baseness, the deformity, the ingratitude, the folly and misery of his proceedings, the poor deceit he has put upon himself, in bartering the solid satisfactions of conscious integrity, the certain dependance upon God's favour, and the glorious prospect of immortality; for delusive dreams of fancied pleasure, ending or beginning rather in certain pains and fears, and a terrible expectation of future vengeance.

This is the time for him to exert his strength

strength, to let his reason conspire with those inward admonitions of Providence, these gentle exhortations of God's informing spirit, till he conceives the strongest detestation and abhorrence of his former practices, by seeing what he has already lost, and what he must still lose by persisting in them. Let him look back to the most ancient records of time, to convince himself in what manner God has universally dealt with the children of disobedience; let him see numbers of angelic natures, immaterial substances, high placed once in glory and power, detruded since from their original state of honour and happiness for their defection from duty, their deviation from truth and reason.

Let him recollect the fatal effects of one transgression in the deluded parents of mankind, not more extensive in its influence than rigorous in its execution; the truth of which history we read but too sensibly written in our own wants and imperfections, in pain, and sickness and death; in a clouded understanding, a perverted will, impetuous passions, delusive affections terminating in the prevalence of moral evil, and the dreadful apprehensions of final retribution.

Let him recall the many instances of men (some great and good ones too) who have undergone the severest chastisements for casual offences. Let him open the ancient volume where he will, he can hardly miss some instance of individuals punished, of a people scourged, of kingdoms subverted, or of the earth itself overwhelmed, for disobedience. Or, if he will judge of the greatness of God's displeasure against sin, by the only atonement he would accept for it, as the danger of the disease may be sometimes collected from the violence of the remedy; let him see the Son of God, the Son of his love, exceeding sorrowful even unto death, praying in agony and sweats like drops of blood—"that, if it were possible, his Father would remit that part of his punishment, and let that bitter cup pass from him;" let him hear him once more expostulating most piteously on the cross—*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* What other more affecting instance would he have to convince him, if this cannot, of God's invincible aversion to sin?

But, as no arguments affect us so

strongly as those which carry experience in their hands, let him turn his eyes inward, let him look within himself, let him see and feel the remorse, the anguish, the horror, the perturbation, the confused agitations of mind, which the commission of wickedness has excited in him; what tortures does he not endure, from apprehending the resentment of that powerful, that formidable adversary, who makes the very heavens tremble at his look! What agony does he not suffer in feeling those denunciations of Divine vengeance in part already fulfilled, and dreading their entire completion hereafter, *that God should rain snares, fire and brimstone, upon the head of sinners, that brimstone with tempestuous winds shall be the portion of their cup.*

From hence let him draw conviction of the folly and misery, as well as deformity and ingratitude, of his ways. From hence let him take such frightful pictures of sin, as may effectually deter him from any farther commerce with it. Let him impress such horrid images of it upon his mind, as may make him fly from it, as from the face of a serpent; as may urge him instantly to make haste and not delay to keep God's righteous judgments.

Nature itself, the great work of God, ever intent upon the preservation of her children, has impressed upon the minds of all, even of brutes and infants, a desire of avoiding whatever objects may at any time have proved frightful and injurious to them. Will the deer return to the toils from which she has just escaped? Will the simplest child be persuaded to touch the firebrand which has once given it pain? Who would wait the advances of a pestilence, or stand unconcerned while the earth was opening its mouth to swallow him up? Nor will any man, who has once formed to himself a just idea of the infectious nature and pernicious effects of sin, allow himself to stand exposed one moment to the miserable consequences.

If he would convert his reflexions upon his past sins, to any good influence upon his future life, he must represent to himself again and again the necessity of instant virtue, and the weakness of those pleas which make for the delay of it. Does he not know that without holiness no man shall see the Lord? that real vir-

tue and obedience are the indispensable conditions of eternal mercy? Has he considered how many passions and inclinations are to be restrained or subdued? How many better dispositions to be acquired or cultivated? Has he considered the extent of life, and proportioned his work to his time? And does he find so little to be done, as will allow him to trifle away any of that time that is allotted for the doing of it? Is virtue a flower of so common and so spontaneous a growth, as requires no care to cultivate? Or is vice a weed so unprolific and so weakly rooted, as may be plucked up in a moment, and spring up no more? Is the great adversary of mankind to be conquered without a struggle? or the assistance of God's good Spirit to be obtained without a prayer? Is eternal misery to be avoided by a wish, and immortal happiness to be attained at pleasure?

Let him that has tried, answer—for he that fancies this, knows nothing of it.

But he is sensible, suppose, of the necessity of reformation, and will certainly set himself to that great business in earnest at the first convenient time; but not to-day.

But what is the difference of any time that is future from that which is now present? barely that it is uncertain, and that, if it ever happens, so much more of life is over without beginning the work—two very unlucky circumstances to make it preferable to the present!

It is most evident, that there must be a beginning to reform, which the longer it is deferred, the work will be increased, the inclination to set about it, and the ability to perform it, be diminished. Is it reasonable to imagine that the difficulty of to-day will be decreased to-morrow? Will custom, that adds strength to all things, diminish the force of inclination and passion? and will delaying to attempt our reformation, make it more easy for us to reform? Will the burthen, which we now think too heavy to bear, become more tolerable by adding to its weight?

Beside, the first years of our life are generally the best; the succeeding ones bring their business with them. If in the strength and vigour of youth we find ourselves unapt to perform this business, can we hope to find ourselves more inclined or more able to perform it in the infirmi-

ties of our wasting age; an age whose cares find it full employment; in which we may have trouble enough, even in supporting life, without the additional trouble of reforming it? Nor can we depend at all upon this scanty and ineffectual opportunity; even upon a supposition that nature should continue its course, and that Providence should not cut us off judicially from arriving at it! He that builds upon the use of any future day, especially of any distant one, must have entirely forgot that there are any diseases in nature which may disable his body, any violent shocks which may disorder the faculties of his mind; has forgot that there are such things as fevers, and palsies, and apoplexies, in the world; has forgot that he has no security for any moment of his life. Of the thousands that died yesterday, why does he fancy that many were not flourishing in youth and strength like him; perhaps, like him too, resolving to reform to-morrow? He must have forgot too, which ought most to be remembered, that it is by God's favour only that he can be enabled to do to-morrow what he is unwilling to attempt to-day. And why should he imagine that God, whose assistance he has so often refused, when it was offered, may not in his turn refuse it too when it is wanted? I will not allow myself to determine what God will do in cases like this; but I think one inspired by him makes him declare himself to this purpose—*Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded, but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I will also laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as a desolation, and your destruction as a whirlwind. When distress and anguish cometh upon you, then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me.*

These are the reasons, the motives rather, which have induced men from time to time to delay that business which can never be begun too soon. These are the rocks that must be avoided by him who would profit from his own transgressions. Say not, *I have sinned, and what harm hath happened unto me?* for though the Lord is long-suffering, he will in no wise let thee go. Concerning propitiation, be not without fear to add sin to sin; and say

say not, *his mercy is great, he will be pacified for the multitude of sins*; for mercy and wrath come from him, and his indignation resteth upon sinners. Make no tarrying to turn unto the Lord, and put not off from day to day; for suddenly shall the wrath of the Lord come forth, and in thy security shalt thou be destroyed, and perish in the day of vengeance.

Far other reasonings, far other resolutions, will he make, whose face is covered with shame at the recollection of his offences. When he considers how far he is gone out of the way, he will make the more instant haste to return. He shall be carried to greater degrees of virtue, by the very violence with which he fell from it; and over his early and hearty repentance, there shall be more joy in heaven than over many others who need no repentance.

S E R M O N VII.

True Notion of Christian Liberty.

JOHN, viii. 32.

Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

THE words are part of a conversation between our blessed Saviour and the Jews, who were assembled in their temple at Jerusalem.

After he had discoursed with them some time, having answered their repeated questions, and silenced all the scruples they had raised concerning his public character, and the evidence of his mission from God, many of them seem inclined to assent to his discourse; to those therefore he addresses himself directly, and tells them, *That if they did but persist in their adherence to those doctrines, of whose evidence and importance they were now in a great measure convinced, they should be his disciples indeed; and they should know the truth, and the truth should make them free.*

The Jews, who, notwithstanding their particular relation to God, seem to have had no very perfect idea of his dispensations, mistook the matter; and conceiving him to speak of national and civil liberty, began to wonder how he could flatter them with the hope of freedom, who did not allow that they had ever yet been slaves. This error of theirs oblig-

ed him, in his reply, to explain himself farther: *You misapprehend me quite*, says he; *the liberty I propose to you is something very different from your conception of it; and how free soever you may fancy yourselves in one sense, you are far from being so in another and better meaning of the word: for whoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin; it is certain from reason and experience, that every sinner is a slave.*

The opposition between the son and the servant, in the succeeding verse, is an intimation from a principle of their own law, "That the Mosaic institution was a temporary and imperfect œconomy; the Christian perfect and eternal; that the law given by Moses was the strength of sin; but that grace and truth, which give us the victory over it, were introduced by Jesus Christ;" he concludes, *therefore, if the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.*

Thus much I thought necessary, to shew the occasion and scope of the passage, from its connexion with the context. I shall make no farther preface; only observe to you, that I think myself at liberty to recede from the limitation of the words, as they are in this case originally applied, and therefore are indeed properly and peculiarly applicable to the Jews, and shall consider them in their universal extent.

The business of this discourse therefore is, to evince the certainty in general of what is here asserted, *that whoever continues in the word of Christ, and is a true disciple of him, shall know the truth, and the truth shall make him free.* We shall be better able to judge how far continuing in the word of Christ may lead a man into the discovery of the truth, and how far the knowledge of the truth is conducive to human liberty, when we have considered,

First, What is meant by continuing in the word.

Secondly, What is comprehended under this expression, "of knowing the truth."

And, thirdly, Wherein true liberty consists, or in what sense the knowledge of the truth may be said to make a man free.

We need but cast our eyes a little backward on the circumstances which introduce the words I have chosen for the

subject of this inquiry, to inform ourselves particularly what is meant by continuing in the word of Christ. He had been declaring expressly to the Jews, "That he was sent as a light into the world, for the information and improvement of men; that the Father by whom he was sent, had himself given an evidence and sanction to the truth of his assertion, which did not rest upon its own authority, by committing the exertion of an unlimited and inimitable power into his hands; that they were inexcusable, therefore, in shutting their eyes against so clear a manifestation of the Deity, and would inevitably exclude themselves from the hope of that mercy which was offered by him, unless they could incline their stubborn hearts to a belief and trust in him who offered it. What is it then, say they, that you would have us believe concerning you? The very thing, says he, that I declared to you from the first, that I am commissioned from the Father of truth to guide you into all truth. This which at present gains but small credit amongst you, the crucifixion which is ready to overtake me, and the amazing events which I tell you before will certainly attend it, shall put beyond doubt, and give you a full, though late, conviction, that I have not assumed a fictitious character, but am in fact what I have all along pretended to be, the anointed, the Saviour, the Son of the living God."

Upon this the historian informs us, "That many assented to his declaration; and upon their assent he assures them, that if they continue in his word, *i. e.* in the belief of that important revelation he had now made, they should be true disciples of him, and should know the truth, and the truth should make them free."

It is evident, then, that by continuing in the word of Christ, is meant, an adherence to that profession to which they had before assented; that Christ Jesus came into the world for the instruction and reformation of men; that he was ordained by the Father of lights to deliver certain truths on earth, which had been hitherto unknown, or imperfectly retained; and, consequently, that whatever he delivered was true. Let us see,

Secondly, What is comprehended in the knowledge of the truth, and seek an answer to that question, What is truth? a question that was once left undecided by

him who was the truth itself. The word is made use of in different parts of the holy writings, to signify very different things. I shall only take notice of some senses it bears, when it is considered with regard to the revelation of Christ. Sometimes I think it is intended to express no more than the bare truth of this assertion, "That Jesus is the Christ." A sense too restrained to be admitted in this place, because the previous consideration of continuing in the word must at least contain thus much, and the discovery of the truth is here supposed to be an advantage consequential to such a perseverance.

Sometimes it is expressive of Christianity, as opposed to Judaism; by which it was delineated and figuratively represented, and to which it stands in no nearer respect, than the real person of a man does to his representation. This sense will certainly answer in this circumstance with respect to the people to whom it was addressed; but the word truth will bear a more extended one, and is at other times opposed to all false systems of worship and manners, and all erroneous methods of reconciling ourselves to God. I now look upon it in this more extensive notion of it; and in this view, the truth must consist in a real representation of those objects with which the religion, the virtue, and the happiness of men is in any evident degree connected. Under the knowledge of the truth therefore must be comprehended a proper conception of those objects which stand in any visible relation to, or connexion with, our happiness.

The definition of liberty is the third and last thing I proposed, in order to form a distinct judgment of the real import of the passage. This likewise will admit of different explications, as it is applied by the sacred writers; in its application to the Jews who became proselytes to Christianity, it sometimes implies no more than a freedom from that hard subjection to ordinances not necessary in themselves, which was a yoke too uneasy for them or their fathers to bear. When it is directed to the converts from paganism, it stretches its comprehension to an exemption from all those doubts and uncertainties which are apt to perplex the understanding, and from those impetuous passions and delusive affections which are sure to confine or obstruct the operations of the will. In this last sense,

as the passage will allow it, I choose now to understand it; and when I come to consider it as resulting from the knowledge of the truth, would have it understood to signify, the free exertion and exercise of all the powers of the human soul, not misguided by prejudice, nor disturbed by passion.

Having now explained the terms and determined their sense, the questions that lie between us are,

First, How far the belief that Christ was sent from God, and a dependance on his veracity, will help us to a real representation of the nature of those objects which stand in any apparent respect to our action and happiness?

Secondly, How far the proper conception of those objects which do stand in any visible regard to our action and happiness, may conduce to the free exertion and exercise of all the powers of the human soul?

First, I shall inquire how far the belief that Christ was sent from God, and a dependance on his veracity, will help us to a real representation of the nature of those objects which stand in any apparent respect to our action and happiness.

And to this I shall answer, as the great Apostle did upon another occasion, "much, every way;" chiefly, that unto those who depend upon the authority of Christ are committed the oracles of God, those uncorrupted fountains of perpetual truth, those overflowings of Divine favour towards the children of men; in which every thing that relates to our duty, or to our interests, is written in such fair and legible characters, that he who runs may read.

From hence we draw those important discoveries of the Divine nature which were unknown to men, till that beloved Son who was in the bosom of the Father, and to whom only they were known, was pleased to reveal them.

Here we learn to admire and adore that happy and only Potentate, that Lord of all dominion; who alone possesses immortality; who inhabits inaccessible light, undiscerned, indiscernible, by men; who, though far removed from us in his essence, does by his influence surround us all; in whom we live, and move, and have our being: not indolent and inactive to neglect, not malicious and revengeful to perplex, the concerns of his creation, he

extends his providential care even beneath the minutest affairs of mankind, to the seemingly less important actions of the sensible and inanimate world; that the lilies of the field owe their little honours to his forming hand; that the fall of the meanest sparrow is not disregarded by his observing eye; and that in his book, not only the lives of men, but the very hairs of their heads, are numbered.

That this paternal affection is not confined to any one sect or nation, but diffused in one common care over all the sons of men. That in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness may be accepted of him. That, in compassion to the miseries of humanity, in the course of his inexplicable providence, he had, from the first stain of evil, from the original defect and corruption of our nature, prepared an antidote, which he did at different times, and in different methods, intimate to our fathers by the prophets; and has now in this last dispensation more fully declared to us by his Son, whom he hath appointed to be our advocate and intercessor, as well as our judge; a judge the more ready to compassionate those infirmities to which he had been subject himself.

Nay, so entirely desirous is this Father of mercies, this God of all consolation, that all men should come to the knowledge of the truth, and attain the possession of eternal happiness, that he does here promise most expressly to send his Holy Spirit to assist our endeavours to attain it. For the Saviour has informed us, that the Father himself will not disdain to be virtually (if not personally) united to the man of an upright heart; to come unto him, and make his abode with him.

This is the description, these the truths, recorded in the holy volume, concerning that high and mighty One, who inhabiteth eternity, on whom our happiness depends.

Let us see now what account it gives us of that happiness itself; how widely different from the received opinions of it!

We usually flatter ourselves with the hope of securing it, by the accumulation of wealth, the acquisition of fame, the increase of knowledge, or the enjoyments of sense.

If we consult the Divine oracles upon each of these heads, we shall find them all exactly weighed and found light in the balance

balance of the sanctuary. We are there advised, if not commanded, to lay up for ourselves treasures, *not on earth, where moths and rust corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal*, but to amass a better treasure in another place, which can neither be corrupted by time, nor destroyed by violence. We are there not encouraged, if not forbid, to buoy ourselves up upon that empty praise of men, which is often ill-grounded, and seldom lasting, which pursues the basest actions, and the worst of men, while it leaves the best in obscurity or disgrace, which extols a Herod into a god, and calls the Saviour of the world a forcerer and a devil.

Knowledge, indeed, should seem to have a fairer pretence for happiness than either wealth or fame; but, unless it be founded upon its proper objects, it is as unsatisfactory as either. The idle studies, the empty learning, the vain distinctions of philosophy, falsely so called, are rather the wanderings of our imagination, than the improvement of our understanding; and however the minds of speculative men may be puffed up with this sort of knowledge, they know nothing yet as they ought to know. When they have attained to the utmost pitch of this world's wisdom, the Apostle will tell them, *it is but foolishness with God*.

And if neither riches, nor honour, nor science, can entirely constitute human happiness, much less is it to be expected from the more irrational, and less lasting pleasures of sense, which, however attracting they may seem in their first allurements, shall in the end bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder.

And, if we give credit to these unerring guides, our fears will appear to be as unreasonable as our desires. Our apprehensions of evil are so strong, that we frequently suffer it before it happens; nay, sometimes that which never does happen. Our very fear of misery creates the pain which never could have existed otherwise; and we endure a more violent sensation from the idea, than we could possibly have suffered from the event. But he *who was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*, will tell us (what we should be inclined to think a paradox), *that these light and momentary afflictions will work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. That whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every*

son whom he receiveth. What the world calls affliction, therefore, is to be considered as an instance of Divine affection, the kind severity of an indulgent parent, and the loving correction which may make us great.

But the most epidemical, as well as the strongest of all our fears, is that of death; a fear which keeps the generality of men all their lives subject to bondage. Will not the sure and certain hope of a resurrection to immortality pull off this dreadful mask? We are convinced from hence, that the only sting of this terrible adversary is sin, and ought to be thankful to that *God who hath given us the victory over it through Jesus Christ our Lord; so that to die, to us is gain*: and this seeming conclusion of our existence is more properly to be considered as the beginning of another and better life, in which, though indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, will be the inevitable lot of every soul that doth evil, yet glory, and honour, and never-ending peace, will be the certain reward of every man who worketh good.

Secondly, This leads us to consider how far the proper conception of those objects, which stand in any apparent respect to our action and happiness, may conduce to the free exertion and exercise of all the powers of the human soul.

From every one of these truths, pursued through their natural consequences, the mind of man may draw constant and fresh supplies towards establishing its perfect freedom.

This amiable representation of the Deity, considered in the endearing relations of the father and friend of men, sets us instantly at liberty from those frightful apprehensions by which superstition had so far enslaved the heathen world, as to lay them under the cruel necessity of offering up their sons and daughters to devils; while it encourages us to serve that God who hath delivered us from our enemies without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life; freeing us at the same time from the uncomfortable situation of atheistical men, who, while they fancy themselves free under the unknown direction of some fixed fate, or fickle chance, speak indeed great swelling words of vanity, and flatter their followers with the hope of liberty, but are themselves the slaves of corruption. Still

Still greater degrees of confidence may we draw from the prospect of being finally judged by one, who, having been tried in all the various circumstances of humanity, will be most ready to afford compassion to men when they shall want it most; a consideration which softens the aspect of the king of terrors, and blunts the points of all the darts of death.

But the most glorious hope arises from that promise, indisputable as to its accomplishment, though inexplicable as to its manner, that the pure Spirit of God shall vouchsafe to reside in our hearts; before him every passion shall fall down, as the idol of Palestine once before the ark of the Lord; for where the Spirit of the Lord is, there must be liberty. He shall convince us of the misery of all selfish views, and shall lead us through all the perplexities of desire and fear, through the restraints of ill-will, of ambition, of avarice, and ungoverned appetite, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

These are the tyrants, this the slavery under which we groan, which chain down the aspiring faculties of the soul, which fasten it to this spot of earth, and hinder us from treading those paths of peace to which celestial wisdom would invite our steps.

Is that man free, rather is he not the worst of slaves, who lives in fear of what may happen this moment; or who encourages a desire which may never be accomplished? He, and he only, is truly free, whose happiness rests upon himself, who dreads nothing but the displeasure of his Maker, whose chief wish is to be approved by him.

We boast of our national freedom, and please ourselves with fancying that all the world beside are slaves. What is this boasted freedom? The security of property and person. I allow it to be a blessing; but is the tranquillity of our mind comprehended in that charter? No; we suffer that to lie at the mercy of every invader. A thousand usurpers are exercising a successive tyranny over that better part, depriving us of that dearest of all possessions, the calm possession of our souls.

What tyrant can put us upon so violent a rack as envy does? What inquisition, with all its tortures, can exceed the agony of a revengeful heart? What prison so close and so uncomfortable as that in

which avarice pens us up? Will ambition allow us to sleep; or unrestrained will to think? and does not the fear of death keep us in the most wretched captivity all our life?

But an attention to the precepts and an imitation of the conduct of Christ shall change this painful scene! We shall see the envious man pleased with the new sensation of good-will to men; the avaricious wondering at the unusual pleasure of his enlarged heart; the resentful amazed at his own gentle disposition; the ambitious happy in retired content; the turbulent sallies of unguided passion subsiding into the more calm and lasting enjoyment of reason and virtue; and the fear of dissolution converted into the cheerful hope of immortal life: this is *the liberty wherewith Christ shall make us free*.

But can there be no liberty (we shall be apt to ask) while any passion remains? Is life to be so severe, so continued a lesson of mortification, as to be thought a slavery, till we have extirpated all desire? Is God so austere a master, to have placed us in the midst of this delightful garden, and forbid us to taste the fruit of every tree? or to have surrounded us with danger, and not permitted us to be afraid? Are we sent into the world to despise it; to renounce all its advantages, all its honours? And were they made so agreeable to our inclinations, only to make it more difficult for us to reject them? I say not so; nor does holy Scripture, so far as I understand it, say any such thing. We are allowed to taste, but not to surfeit. The exertion of all our powers is a duty so evidently incumbent upon us, that we should lose the end of life without it. It is, when unrestrained, the very liberty after which we are inquiring. The passions are no farther to be suppressed than as they restrain those powers; and the due exertion of them does naturally lead us to the esteem of men, and to the real enjoyment of life. Christianity does not tantalize us with the glories of the world. The slavery consists in pursuing them too eagerly, in being impatient at the disappointment, or insolent in the success. To raise ourselves to a still greater ability of doing good, is a laudable ambition; to have our minds prepared to do so, is liberty.

O Liberty! fair child of truth! necessary result of Divine influence! fruitful

ful parent of internal peace ! thou raisest the mind above the tyranny of abject passion ; not dissolved in the blandishments of better fortune, not terrified with the frowns of worse ; capable of enjoying the blessings of one, incapable of suffering the injuries of the other ; fixed on the immoveable foundation of real virtue ; unalterable by any variety of accidental circumstance ; stranger to all selfish views ; thou extendest thy generous affection through all the charities of each relation ; enlarging thy own happiness in the unbounded wish for that of others : by thee, the good man, patriarch, prophet, apostle, martyr, is taught to triumph over poverty, over calumny, over tortures and death ; thou leadest him by the hand in humble confidence through the perplexities of this earthly labyrinth ; safe under thy conduct, he knows no fear but infamy, and his ruling hope is immortality.

SERMON VIII.

Prayer an Antidote against Temptation.

MATTH. vi. 13.

Lead us not into temptation.

WHOEVER reflects seriously upon the number, the variety, and the violence of the temptations which surround us, with the additional force they acquire from the depravity of many, the inattention of most, and the infirmity of all ; the little ability we have, and the less inclination, to overcome them ; the deceitfulness of sin itself, and our own propensity to assist the deceit : whoever, I say, considers this with seriousness and attention, proportionable to the evidence and importance of the truth, will find but too great reason to address himself frequently and fervently to the throne of grace, *that it would please God not to lead him into temptation.*

For though it be most true, as the Scripture assures us, *that God doth not tempt any man* ; that is, that it is inconsistent with the character of a wise and good God, to lay snares and stumbling-blocks in the way of his creatures, to divert them from the paths of virtue, or to seduce them into the road of folly and vice ; yet it is as certain from experience,

that temptations must, and do come, that there are some temptations which are common to men ; temptations to which all mankind are more or less subject, intended, indeed, not to delude them from their duty, but to confirm them in it.

And though it be advised as matter of Christian perfection by one Apostle, *to count it all joy when we fall into various temptations* ; yet it is allowed by another, as a natural effect of human infirmity, to be in heaviness on the same account. And notwithstanding that both these Apostles are agreed in the excellent use we may make of temptations, when considered as opportunities of establishing our faith, yet neither of them seem to have been insensible of the danger and hazard that must necessarily attend them, when considered as trials of it.

It was undoubtedly this consideration that induced the innocent and holy Jesus (who was in every circumstance tempted as we are), who could not therefore be ignorant of the danger, though he overcame the power of the temptation, to prescribe it as a subject of useful and necessary prayer to God, *that he would not lead us into temptation.*

Indeed every object and every circumstance of life may lead us into temptation. Our happiness, as well as our misery, may conspire to tempt us. The blessings of Heaven lift us up to presumption ; the judgments sink us down to despair. The most agreeable appearances are apt to affect us too strongly one way ; the most disagreeable another. Riches are the parents of pride and luxury ; poverty of meanness and rapine. Power is allied to insolence and contempt ; the want of it to slavery and envy. Company inclines us to levity ; solitude to moroseness. Our friendships draw us insensibly to hate those who hate our friends ; and our aversions hurry us into the strictest alliance with those who have no other recommendation, but their hatred of the people that we dislike. Our very tables may be a snare to us ; the liquor which refreshes us in one degree, is converted into poison in another ; and the food which should have been for our health, becomes too often an occasion of falling. Nay, we are sometimes led into temptation by endeavouring to avoid it ; and rebound with such violence from one vice, that we are carried quite backward into the opposite extreme.

extreme. A man may become an infidel to avoid the imputation of credulity; and the abhorrence of avarice has made many a prodigal.

But, besides these natural inducements to evil, there is one more, which gives weight and force to all the rest; the great artificer of fraud, the father of lies, the tempter, the deceiver, the devil. He spreads his nets so artfully, that we are fast bound while we fancy ourselves free, and entangle ourselves more by struggling to be loose. He adapts his alluring baits to the taste of the palate he intends to deceive: to the covetous he presents mountains of gold, to the ambitious crowns of honour; he entertains the voluptuous with prospects of pleasure, the indolent and inactive with dreams of ease. He transforms himself into every shape; and assumes any character which may best serve his dark designs. The craft of the serpent shall put on the innocence of the dove. He can clothe himself in the garb of an angel of light, when the mask of virtue may contribute to extend the dominion of vice. He takes the same method to damn men's souls, that the great Apostle did to save them. To the Jews he becomes a Jew, that he may deceive the Jews; to them that are without law, as without law, that he may delude those that are without law; to the weak, he becomes as weak, that he may overcome the weak. In short, he makes himself all things to all men, that by any means he may be able to destroy some.

So strongly attacked from without, and so weakly guarded within, we must seek for superior assistance, or inevitably fall into the hand of the enemy. In this most dangerous situation, we may apply almost literally to our own case those emphatical words of the Psalmist—*If the Lord himself were not on our side, if the Lord himself were not on our side, when the tempter rises up against us, he would swallow us up quick, and the stream would run over our soul. But praised be the Lord, who hath not given us over for a prey unto his teeth! Our soul shall escape as a bird out of the snare of the Fowler; the snare shall be broken, and we shall be delivered.*

There is one duty which seems to be a probable, if not a certain method, either to prevent the rise or to suppress the force of these evils. The duty I mean is prayer; which the words themselves, being a

form of prayer, seem immediately and naturally to suggest.

I shall, therefore, in the sequel of this discourse, endeavour to evince the reasonableness, the necessity, and the advantage of prayer, as an antidote against the power of temptation; and to press the performance of this duty upon you with all the powerful persuasion of easy and unaffected truth; divested of those illusive embellishments of art and oratory, which are better calculated to amuse the imaginations of men, than to convince their understandings.

It is usual for us, even in the common course of natural affairs, when we are embarrassed, or likely to be so in any difficulty, which we are not able, by our own strength, to avert or overcome; it is usual for us, I say, in such a case, to make our application to those whose good-will may incline them to assist us; and who may be capable by their skill to prevent, or by their power to overcome, the distress. And we cannot commend, though we may compassionate, the conduct of those persons, who, either through indolence, or diffidence and despondency, or too great an opinion of their own sufficiency, neglect that proper application to others which was absolutely necessary, and might have been entirely effectual to extricate them out of all their difficulties.

Now every one of these qualities, any one of which (singly) might induce us to apply to the person endued with it, in our distress, are all, in the most perfect manner, united in the character of God. His good-will to us is evident, in that he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. When they are afflicted either by the necessary order of natural causes, or the ill effects of their own imprudence; though he permit them to be grieved in this manner, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. And his knowledge is as extensive as his benevolence; for all things are naked, and open to his eye; from whence it follows that he cannot but know how to deliver the godly out of temptation. And his power is also equal to the execution of what his goodness has suggested and his wisdom designed. For the Lord is mighty to save; the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot redeem; the Lord has power to deliver; as he sees clearly the strength of all our trials, and

our

our own inability to support ourselves under them, so he will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear, but will, with the temptation also (if we make our prayer to him in an acceptable time) find a way for us to escape before the assault be irresistible.

Considering, therefore, the tender disposition of our kind Creator towards us; his wisdom to discern our difficulties, and his power to divert them; his positive command that we should pray to him, and his express promise to hear our prayers; what folly (to say no worse) shall we be guilty of, if we neglect to seek for that consolation which he assures us we shall find; to ask for that help which he informs us we shall receive; and to knock at that door which he has promised to open as a sanctuary in the day of our trial, as a refuge in the hour of distress!

But it must be remembered, that our prayer to God to deliver us will avail but little, if we overlook the means of our own deliverance; our prayer that he would not lead us into temptation, will have but a poor effect, if in the mean time we run wilfully, or rashly, or carelessly, into it. We pray to God to give us our daily bread; but no man is weak enough to fancy, that when his prayer is concluded, he has done all that is required of him; no man is vain enough to flatter himself with the hope that he may then sit still, and expect his food from heaven; that the fowls of the air shall supply him with provisions, as they did the fainting prophet; or that they shall descend in a miraculous shower, as they once did in the desert, and obsequiously intrude themselves into his tent, and crowd themselves round about his habitation. Every body sees the folly of so groundless a presumption: but we are not always so quick in discerning the weakness of the other, which, if founded to the bottom, is equally unreasonable. For, sure, one should think it a high degree of extravagance for any man (when he feels the poison boiling in his blood, which he has obstinately and greedily imbibed into his veins) to imagine that the wise contriver and impartial governor of the universe should engage himself, upon the bare strength of his prayer, in a miraculous interposition, to suppress its operation, and prevent its effect. One cannot but look on it as the height of folly, even to distraction, for any man, who is

throwing himself headlong down a precipice, to expect that his supplication shall influence the Deity to give his angels charge over him, that he hurt not his foot against a stone. No man's apprehension is so dull, but he may be sensible, at first sight, of the extreme weakness and unreasonableness of such suppositions. But we are too ready to throw the imputation of such weakness from ourselves, and fancy that nothing like this can or does ever appear in our own conduct. But, alas! it is evident, that something of this kind, and even to this degree, may be observed in the conduct of every sinner: for every deliberate sinner does voluntarily suck that poison into his veins, which must, according to the natural constitution and course of things, corrupt and prey upon his powers, and terminate in his ruin. Every obstinate and head-strong sinner does stand upon the brink of destruction, and wilfully throws himself down a precipice, the fall from which must naturally and necessarily (without straining the figure) dash him against rocks of misery, and plunge him in gulphs of distress.

In short, it appears from these practical observations, that every prayer supposes the earnest endeavour of the person who prays, to avert the evil against which he prays. God, willing and powerful as he is to save, will yet save no man against his will; whoever would enter into the strait gate, must strive to do it.

But it may be said, if our endeavours are absolutely necessary to remove those evils, if, notwithstanding all our prayers, they continue in full force, till, by our own resolutions and actions, we have effected their removal, why may not our own resolution and endeavour perform all this without the assistance of prayer and supplication at all? What is the advantage of addressing ourselves to Heaven in such cases as these? or (to use the words of an ancient writer) *what profit shall we have if we pray unto him?*

Now, in answer to this too common pretence for neglecting our applications to God, it should be observed carefully, in the first place, that God has expressly commanded us to pray upon this very occasion. *Fast, and pray* (says our Saviour) *that ye enter not into temptation.* And he affirms as expressly in another place (speaking of those cruel temptations to

which

which the devil was permitted to subject the people of Judea in his time), that there was no other means of being freed from them but by prayer and fasting. This kind of affliction and trial, says he, is not to be eradicated but *by prayer and fasting*.

It is evident, therefore, that God has commanded us to pray to him particularly in circumstances of trial and distress; and it is as clear, that he has promised to hear and to answer the prayers we put up to him in our difficulties of this kind; for the friendly and faithful Jesus assures us, *that if we will ask, we shall have; if we will seek, we shall find; if we will but knock, the door shall be opened unto us*. And one of his Apostles tells us, *that the prayer of faith shall save the sick; that the earnest and intense prayer of a just man has a prevailing influence, even to remove the difficulties of another person*; and if so, certainly it cannot be less effectual to remove those under which he labours himself.

Since, then, we are obliged, by the express command of God, and encouraged by his positive promise, to offer up our prayers to him in all cases of trial and difficulty, it will be vain in any man to plead in excuse for the neglect of this duty, that he could not discover the manner in which the assistance should be conveyed to man, nor the method in which it should operate to his relief. This would be as ridiculous, as if a man should neglect to observe the prescription of a skilful and experienced physician, only because he could not acquaint himself with the nature of his medicine, nor conceive by what means it would produce its effects. Nay, it would be so much more ridiculous, as the utmost art of man can only extend itself to the discovery of means which may attain their end in some cases only, and in a particular conjuncture of things; but the directions of God, when justly observed, must be effectual at all times, and in every case; they must be infallible and universal.

But it may be urged, farther, that though we have prayed with great sincerity and attention, and have exerted our endeavours for the prevention or removal of these evils, yet neither the sincerity of our prayers, nor the exertion of our other endeavours, have been able either to prevent or remove them.

All this, I grant, may be in a great measure true; but this argument can no more authorize our desisting from prayer, than the other could our entire omission of it. For we are not only commanded to pray, but to continue earnest in prayer, and not to faint or despair because we do not immediately perceive the success of it. And though the Saviour condemns and disapproves the conduct of those who were weak enough to imagine that they should be heard for the multiplicity of their words, yet he recommends and encourages (if he does not command) an importunity in prayer, in that parable, where he represents the success of it upon a magistrate who had no regard for the good of his fellow-creatures, nor reverence for the glory of his Creator. And, indeed, to desist from praying, purely because we do not immediately perceive the visible effects of our prayers, is contrary to what we do in the most common affairs of life. No man throws aside the use of a medicine (which he is assured will be effectual), because he does not find that it has instantly effected his recovery. If he find but a little relief from it at present, it encourages his hope to persevere in the repetition of it till it has absolutely perfected the cure.

But to give the objection its utmost extent, and put it in its full force, let us suppose that there may be cases in which no prayer, nor any endeavour, can totally remove the temptation; I allow that there may happen cases of this kind, where the temptation may either be so involved in the very frame and constitution of our nature, or so annexed to other concurring circumstances of our external condition, that no efforts we can make shall ever be able absolutely to dissolve it. But then I say, that even in this case (which is the strongest that can be supposed), we are still under the same, the very same, obligations to pray, and to make use of all other probable means to remove the temptation, as in any other case whatever, as will appear to every man who gives a proper attention to the truth of these following observations.

First, then, It must be observed, that though we admit it to be possible, and even allow it to be true, in fact, that some particular men may labour under grievous temptations, which, from their original adherence to their natures, or from their

inseparable

inseparable connexion with their circumstances, cannot ever, in the natural course of things, admit of a removal: yet no man can possibly be certain that this is his own case, nor ought ever to presume it to be so; for we find, by experience, that, in the most common cases of natural infirmity, we often take those wounds to be mortal, and those diseases to be incurable, which yet, by proper care and application, do, in many instances, admit of a happy cure and perfect recovery. And,

Secondly, It should be observed, farther, and most carefully remembered, that God's command to us, that we should pray to him in cases of temptation, and his promise to assist those who do so, is not limited, but universal, and without exception. As the command, therefore, is universal, so should the act of obedience be, and so most certainly the assistance will.

Prayer, therefore, is still necessary, and will be effectual to relieve us under our trial, though it may not, in some cases, be equally so to remove it from us. Now, if it be evident, that prayer will in all cases take away from the force of the temptation, and abate the edge of our trial, by removing part of our pain, though in some circumstances it may be impossible, and in others improper, to remove the whole, there is sufficient ground for every reasonable man to call upon the Lord in his trouble, who will undoubtedly *hear his cry, and will help him.* And this, too, is exactly conformable to what we usually do in matters that relate to our health. For though a man labour under a distemper which is, by all men, and by himself, considered as incurable, he does not immediately determine to lay aside the use of all medicines, but is glad to apply such as may afford him some small comfort, some short respite from his pain, and is pleased to find, that by such helps he can make that condition barely tolerable, which he knows it is not in his power absolutely to remove.

This was the case of that great Apostle St. Paul, when he was pressed by that heavy and irremovable temptation, which he represents under those strong expressions of *athorn in his flesh, and a scourge of the tempter.* He did not argue (as inconsiderate men are too apt to do), that the hope of removing it was absurd, and that it would be in vain for him to pray for its removal. On the contrary, he made his

earnest supplication to God, with whom he knew all things were possible; nor did he despair upon the ill success of his first address, but thrice he besought the Lord. He continued to repeat his supplication, till he received this answer: "That it was not proper, indeed, to remove it entirely; but that God's favourable assistance should be sufficient for him;" which evidently implied the necessity of continuing in prayer, even after he knew that the evil, against which he prayed, could not be removed. For we all know, that the favour of God is not to be obtained without our prayer for it, because God does not give the assistance of his holy spirit but to those who ask it. The impossibility, then, of removing an evil by prayer, even when it is known (which it never can certainly be by us), is so far from being an objection against the use of prayer, that it is perhaps one of the strongest arguments for it; and to neglect praying for assistance to support us under an evil which cannot be removed, would be a weakness like to that of a little state, which, being surrounded with a powerful enemy, should refuse to call in such assistance, and to make such provisions as were necessary to obstruct the incursions of the enemy, because it despaired of being able totally to defeat him.

Let us, therefore, when we are closely surrounded by these thorns in the flesh, or when we are pressed by the cares of the world, which are also, in the language of the Scripture, represented as thorns, offer up our prayers to the wise, and kind, and powerful God, *who will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear,* and whose favour we shall find to be sufficient for us; sufficient to resist and finally overcome those temptations, which at present it may either be impossible or improper to remove.

I shall conclude the whole with two reflexions, which shall neither be so long as to take up much of your time, nor, I hope, so tedious as to tire your patience.

First: Since it appears from the preceding observations, that almost every object is capable of exciting in men some irregular desire, or awakening some irrational fear, it follows, that the temptations to which human nature is liable are as numerous as the objects which surround it, and the passions to which it is subject. Now as there is no man who is

exempt

exempt from the power of every passion, so there is hardly any that is subject to the dominion of all. Some passions are in their very essence so directly contrary to each other, that one would think it impossible for the same breast to be under the influence of both. But in the constitution of every mind, we may generally observe some one passion to have the ascendant, which (like Moses's serpent) controls and swallows up all the rest. In subordination to this, all the inferior affections apply their proper acts, which, like a hidden spring, informs and actuates the whole machine. Nay, it even adopts passions contrary to the natural turn of the mind, and inconsistent with each other, when they can be subservient to the propagation of its main design. You shall see the same man disposed to clemency or cruelty, to parsimony or prodigality, to arrogance or affability, to temperance or excess, as any or all of these different dispositions may contribute most to the indulgence of his favourite affection.

It is the business, therefore, of every wise man, to examine into the most violent bent of his own heart, and to be most upon his guard against that prevalent inclination which most easily invades him. This is the principle that must be eradicated; this is the passion that will absolutely govern, if it be not absolutely governed. To correct the lesser desires, while this predominates, is little more than pruning the branches, which will soon shoot out again while the trunk remains; it is only to suppress a few little heats, which will instantly return while the disease is in the blood.

Second and last observation. I have hitherto recommended prayer to you, barely on account of that divine assistance which we may certainly expect from the explicit promise of God on the performance of his express command. But, since there are now so few genuine children of that father of the faithful who durst follow his Maker without knowing whither he went, since the generality of mankind are inclined to walk by sight, and not by faith, I shall now make it appear that prayer is, in its own nature, admirably adapted to suppress the impetuosity of passion, and to subdue the violence of temptation.

"Sunt verba & voces, quibus hunc lenire dolorem
"Possis, & magnam morbi deponere partem."

Whatever was the original and superstitious intention of this sentiment, sure, if it was ever applicable to any one thing in the world, it is literally so to prayer; for there is a kind of natural and powerful charm in the very act of prayer, which soothes the impulse of the most pressing passion, and abates the violence of the most urgent pain. When a man prostrates himself before that discerning mind, who sees every motion and disposition of his soul, the most impetuous passion will not dare to raise its head; it will subside insensibly, and sink into inaction. This will give him time to recall his reason, to recollect his strength. His inclinations will, by this means, constantly lose ground, and, by being often repulsed, will at length be entirely defeated.

A man cannot pray to God to free him from the dominion of his passions, without wishing to be free, without resolving to free himself. And it is on our weakness that they found their strength, it is to our willing captivity that they owe their easy conquest: we might soon put an end to that slavery, if we did but heartily wish for freedom. A small degree of honest resolution would dissolve the charm. We may truly say of our desires, as the Saviour did of him who loves to foment them, *resist the passion, and it shall flee before you.*

A man cannot pray against an evil, without considering the causes which excite, and the circumstances which encourage it. And to be ignorant of the nature of one's complaint, is very often the occasion of prolonging and increasing it; but to know the cause of a disorder, has been always esteemed a very considerable step towards the cure of it.

In short, a man cannot pray for the removal of an evil, unless he has some hope that it may be removed. Now the very distrust of our own power, is often the very reason of our inability. If we could but persuade ourselves that a thing were possible to be done, we should many times be able to effect it. Despair enervates the faculties, and makes that impossible to us which in itself is not so. But hope is of a quite contrary complexion, and superinduces an accession of power to our natural strength. His very hope, then, shall insure his victory, he shall go forth, conquering and to conquer.

Let us now look back upon the difficulties

ties with which we must unavoidably engage, from the world, the tempter, and ourselves. The world is made up of snares for those that are innocent; of baits for those who are not so: every thing we love, every thing we hate, is capable of throwing some unhappy bias upon the mind; and that father of mischief, who is represented as a roaring lion seeking what he may devour, has as many devices to turn the things which are innocent, and those which were intended to be useful, to our destruction.

Besides these, there is a nearer enemy, whom you fear less, perhaps, but have not less reason to fear, that treacherous inmate, yourself.

All the allurements of the world, all the illusions of the tempter, might be repelled, if we could but securely rely upon ourselves. For this reason we are called upon by the nature of our situation, as loudly as by the voice of our Redeemer, to watch, to strive, to fight, to wrestle, nay, earnestly to contend.

The gospel deals plainly with us, and confirms every determination of our experience, when it represents our state as a warfare; when it compares the conflict with our passions, to the racking operations of cutting off a right hand, of tearing out a right eye; when it figures us as in a race, and that towards a high place, before we can arrive at which all our spirits must be exerted, and every nerve be strained.

It is not enough that we rouse ourselves once, and then sink into inactivity; we must look upon ourselves as persons who are swimming upwards against a rapid stream; every stroke we miss, will make two more necessary. There can be no resting in the case; we must advance continually, or be hurried back for ever. Our strength will be exhausted, and the way made longer, by remissness.

As our care must be perpetual, it should be universal too; you would follow your Redeemer, no doubt, where the road is smooth; when it grows rugged and tedious, you would stop short and forsake him; you would compliment your master with doing so much of his service as costs you no trouble, and where that begins your religion ends; that is, you generously renounce those vices to which you have no propensity, but throw the rein upon the neck of those passions which solicit you with pleasure.

Is this the result of your christian warfare, to make gallant shew and promise of courage, when no enemy appears; to turn your back on the first alarm of his approach? Is this a struggle deserving that high prize which is reserved only for those who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality?

Do you call this subduing your passions, to change a vice which is worn out, and you are tired of, for one that is more agreeable to you, and has novelty to recommend it?

You may as well call it temperance, not to be sober, but to be intoxicated only with the liquor which you like.

And is this the method of reconciling yourself to your Maker, by corresponding only with that part of his enemies to which you have no particular aversion? It is absurd, it is impracticable; you cannot divide yourself between God and any of your inclinations. He admits of no competitor; and if you give him not all your heart, and all your soul, he will accept of none of it.

Reflect a while, and recollect the different apprehensions of mind you have felt, when you have manfully subdued all your passions, or suffered yourselves tamely to be brought into subjection to any of them.

How agreeable, how delightful, how big with ecstacy, is the thought of being just now (let what will happen) within reach of that triumphant expectation, excited by that most encouraging declaration of the Saviour, *to him who overcometh will I give to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.*

The possession of all this world, with all its visionary, sickly, unsteady honours, is not worthy to be compared with the real, substantial, and permanent satisfaction, which that single reflexion can afford to a mind looking down upon this dirty spot, soaring up on the wings of devotion to the realms of light, and laying hold on a crown of immortality.

Think again; look back into your hearts, and call to remembrance the fear, the shame, the horrible forebodings of guilt which sat heavy on your soul, when conscious of having deserted the standard of your Master, of having declined the conflict in which he triumphed!

Intolerable! insupportable thought! which nothing can exceed but the actual torment

torments of devoted souls, which nothing can alleviate but the healing sacrifice of a contrite heart.

You know your danger, you know your dependence; it rests on the aid of that pervading Spirit, the Illuminator, the Comforter of holy souls, under the auspicious banner of that Captain of your salvation (who encourages by his example what is enjoined by his command) in whom you shall have peace. In the world you must meet with temptations; but be of good cheer, not doubting that ye shall, through him, as he did of his own strength, overcome the world.

S E R M O N IX.

Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

LUKE, XVI. 25.

Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivest thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things. But now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

THIS sentence, I need not tell you, is taken out of one of the most striking parables of the gospel. The parable is addressed by our blessed Lord to the Pharisees, whose character in it is, that they loved money, but neglected the proper use of it.

The very end and design of this parable, therefore, is, to teach those who abound in wealth in what manner they ought to apply some part of it, at least, by shewing them what will be the dreadful, the unavoidable, and the irreversible consequence of misapplying it.

Whoever supposes it to be a rude undistinguishing satire upon those who are possessed of large estates is mistaken, both in the disposition of the blessed Author of this instruction, and in the intent of the instruction itself; which is plainly calculated, not as an insult upon men of great fortunes, but as an admonition to those who have great fortunes indeed, but little minds, to enlarge their hearts with their estates.

Let men be as rich as they will, provided their humanity and benevolence bear a just proportion to their wealth. It is a notion as wild as it is uncharitable, to fancy that it is literally impossible for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The rich man here condemned, is condemned for his luxury and inhumanity; but if there be others as rich as, but more humane and charitable than, he was, we may be assured that such men are as far from this man's condemnation, as they have been from his character.

I will give you some account of this man, as it may be collected from this representation of him in the gospel, that, by avoiding his conduct, you may avoid his punishment. He was rich—by inheritance is not said, or by his own acquisition—probably by both, for we find that he had five brethren, who are all represented as in the same case with himself. But by which soever of these ways he became rich—there is yet no harm done; if by his own industry—the man was to be commended; if by descent—who can blame him?

But he lived and dressed with state and delicacy; he was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously—and this not occasionally and by accident, but it was his manner and custom of life—he did it every day.

In this, perhaps, you may think he carried the matter too far; an interval now and then of fasting and sackcloth might have happily interrupted the luxury of his table, and the elegance of his dress. However, even this will admit of some excuse; it contributed to the circulation of money. The tradesman probably was the better, and the man himself, if he did it upon that consideration, possibly, not much worse.

But there was an object of charity who lay at his door; his name was Lazarus, and his condition corresponded with his name. He had no patron but Providence. This man, poor and helpless, and full of ulcers, lay at the rich man's door. He could hardly be a stranger to his misery and necessity—we are assured, from the sequel of the story, that he was not; for as soon as he saw him, but afar off in another place, where it was more convenient for him to be acquainted with him, he knew him at first sight—he lost no time in seeking his acquaintance—he cried out, *Father Abraham, send Lazarus.*

This very Lazarus is now begging to be fed—with what? not with the sumptuous dishes that adorned his board—of these, 'tis likely, he hardly knew the names! not with the food which regaled

the haughty master—nor even with the fragments which surfeited his pampered servants—but with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table! This was no sturdy beggar; nothing could be more modest than this request. His modesty, however, had as little effect as his poverty or his wounds; neither the lord nor his retinue supplied him with any relief, or so much as recommended him to an infirmary. Nay more—the very dogs came and licked his wounds! Was this, by an office of tenderness, to reproach the hard-heartedness of their master, or in imitation of his inhumanity, to fall upon him as their prey?

Worn at last with poverty and pain, he sunk into that sure refuge of the miserable, where the wicked cease from troubling, where the weary be at rest—he died—and, by the silence of the historian, we may fairly suppose, was thrown aside without any other care, than what was convenient for the ease of those who survived him. So inhuman a disposition, as this conduct towards Lazarus discovered in this rich man, would have been inexcusable in a Heathen; doubly so in one who lived under a written law of God. For this man is supposed to have been a son of Abraham, a Jew, subject consequently to the force and penalty of a statute which he acknowledged to be divine, by which it was expressly enacted, Deut. xv. 7, 8. *If there be among you a poor man, of one of thy brethren, within any of thy gates, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand against thy poor brother. But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need in that which he wanteth.*

By this institute, you see, the poor amongst the Jews became an essential part of their retinue to the rich. They came recommended by God, who declared that they should never cease out of the land; that the reciprocal duties of charity and humility, of benevolence, on both sides, might be kept up for ever—therefore I command thee, saying, *Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor and to thy needy in thy land.* The poor, under this œconomy, had as good a right to what the rich could conveniently spare, as he himself could have to what he could properly enjoy.

This right the rich man in the parable withheld—he sacrificed to his vanity, the health, the ease, the life of the poor—the curse of him that was ready to perish came upon him—and all his wealth could not retrieve from, perhaps hastened him to, the grave. Thither let us follow him. The same pomp which gave the colour to his life, attended his exit also; for the rich man died, and was buried. In this too he was distinguished from Lazarus. Here no expence was wanting, to represent the inexpressible concern of the person who succeeded him in his estates, who was undoubtedly too much affected to attend to any thing but the will of the deceased. Nor could there be wanting some friendly priest to dress out the funeral oration, some favourite poet to adorn the monumental brass with a long catalogue of all his virtues, particularly his benevolence and his bounty.

Here was an end of the poor man's patience, and of the rich man's pleasure. God took the poor man first, to remove him from the inconvenience of the present life. To the rich man he gave longer time, that he might not want opportunity to shake off his attachment to this, and prepare himself for the account to be given in another life.

You have heard what happened to them here; our blessed Lord has been pleased to draw the curtain, and shew us them in very different circumstances hereafter. After he was dead, the poor man was carried by angels—the host of heaven were stationed to receive him, and to bear him on joyful wings to the place which had been prepared for him—they carried him to Abraham's bosom. The father of the faithful, moved with compassion at the long sorrows of his son, received him into his bosom. He whom we saw cast out at the rich man's door, is now placed nearest to the king, at the marriage-feast of his son. He who had imitated Abraham's faith, was now partaking the reward of Abraham.

With the rich man, too, the scene was changed. Instead of being clothed with purple and fine linen, he is exposed naked to the flames. Instead of faring sumptuously, he consumes with drought; if Lazarus begged in vain for crumbs of meat, so does he now for one drop of water. In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments. And to increase his torment,

ment, at a distance and in a happier place, the first object he knows is Lazarus. That Lazarus who was not admitted to partake with his dogs, is now feasting with angels and with Abraham. Unhappy man! Not one of thy purple friends, not one of thy haughty family, not one of thy numerous servants, to attend thee now. What wretched company hast thou kept on earth, that thou art not able to find out one of them in heaven? Too just judgment of an avenging God, to make thee beg relief of the very wretch to whom thou hadst denied it! to make thee ask in vain as he did! *Send Lazarus, father Abraham, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.*

To be sunk down from plenty to absolute want, from the highest pomp to the most abject beggary; to see those who were lately dependent upon you exalted in an instant above you, and yourself reduced to a state of dependance upon them; would raise a hard struggle even in a good mind, and prove an insupportable trial to a bad one.

To be reduced by your misery to ask for help, to be condemned for your punishment to be refused it! Yet this hard case is the rich man's case; he is forced to seek for succour of the last person in the world to whom he would chuse to be obliged, and has the mortification not to succeed in his request. For what says Abraham? *Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivest thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things—but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.*

Is prosperity then a crime, and is a man to be punished in the next world, merely because he is prosperous in this? or are the sufferings of one man to be placed to the account of another? and am I to be condemned because you are unfortunate? Neither. Prosperity is then only culpable, when it is unsocial and selfish; and we are then only accountable for the misfortunes of others, when we withhold the relief which they want, and we can give.

This was the crime of the person before us; this was his condemnation: not simply because he had received his good things in his life-time, but because he riotied in them without any thought of the next. Not because Lazarus had his evil things, but because his evils were increased by the closeness of this man's

hand, and the hardness of his heart. *But now he is comforted*; according to the exactest notions we have of the Divine justice, who inflicts penalties upon his faithful servants, in order to increase their happiness by the trial of their faith; and in consequence of his express promise, *that the needy shall not always be forgotten, the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever.*

And thou art tormented. This is the last effort of God's severity, upon those who oppress his servants, and abuse the trust which he has reposed in them. And this too corresponds exactly with his express denunciation. *He loved cursing, so let it come unto him; he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him; because that he remembered not to show mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man, that he might even slay the broken in heart.*

And the torments here described are not only represented as insupportable, and such as would not admit of the slightest mitigation; not one drop of water to cool his tongue; but such too as would admit of no release, from which there could be no redemption; for between the good and bad, the happy and miserable, a great gulph is fixed, so as to allow no communication between the separate states.

You have seen this man's fate, you have heard the cause of it; he squandered away in luxury what was intrusted with him for the poor. By his want of compassion to his fellow-creature, he excluded himself from the mercies of God; he involved himself in misery, which can neither be described nor conceived; for the torments of hell are in that respect like the happiness of heaven, *such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive.* They are insupportable, they are unintermitting, they are endless. *Who can dwell with everlasting burnings?* If you shudder at the penalty, you must avoid the crime.

These poor children are now to you what Lazarus was to the rich man in the parable: they are helpless, and laid at your door; they call upon you for relief; they ask not to be admitted into your houses, to be seated at your tables; they desire only the crumbs that fall from your table. A part of your superfluity will satisfy all their desires: can you harden your hearts, can you shut your ears, and close your hands, at their petition?

Think not of this world and its vanity too much ; give up some idle fashion, some hurtful diversion, some pernicious pleasure, to the prospect of eternity. Take heed how you despise one of these little-ones. A greater than I has told you, that their angels continually behold the face of our heavenly Father ; angels who are ready to carry them from all the hardships and injuries they may suffer from you, to a place of happiness and honour, even to Abraham's bosom.

But if that should happen to them through your uncharitableness, think what will become of you ! *Son, remember, said Abraham. Dreadful recollection ! Let me teach you a more useful lesson. Look beforehand ; think what will be the consequence, and think to prevent it. Your piety and your alms may now prevent those tortures, which no after-tears or prayers can abate.*

If you would have been condemned for want of charity under the law of Moses, how much more will you be culpable under the gospel of Jesus Christ ! You have now the very request which the rich man made in vain granted unto you, which he thought sufficient to prevent his brethren from falling into that place of torment.

You hear in this parable the very account which Lazarus would give you, if he were to return from the dead ; of the miseries which are reserved for luxury and uncharitableness in another life : *Nay, father Abraham, says he, but if one went from the dead, they will repent. They will no longer go on in a course which they know must lead to the chambers of death.*

You have now that very favour vouchsafed to you which was refused to them ; one who has returned from the dead is now instructing you, even Christ Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life. He speaks to you by his apostles and ministers, charging them that are rich in this world, that they be *ready to give, and glad to distribute ; laying up for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may inherit eternal life.*

Make therefore to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

In a word, let the poor learn piety and patience, from the lot of Lazarus ; let

the great avoid luxury and inhumanity, from the rich man's doom. You see from this very case, that uncharitableness of itself (for the person here represented is not charged with any other crime) is sufficient to exclude you from the kingdom of heaven, and bring you into the place of torment.

All other pretences to religion are vain, unless you have that belief which operateth by love. It is an idle dream to suppose that any distinction you enjoy above other men will be in the least regarded before God ; for he seeth the heart, and will judge you by your heart.

Riches are a present blessing, and may contribute to a greater blessing hereafter ; if you employ them to promote justice, and peace, and happiness in the world. But if you forget the God who gave them, and the ends for which they were given ; if in your life-time you expend every thought how you shall amuse yourself only with these good things, to the exclusion of the poor and him that hath no helper, beware, lest ye also come into this place of torment.

Lastly, this man was a son of Abraham ; descended from that father of the faithful to whose seed the promises were made ; but he forfeited his privileges by his ill conduct. If he had been indeed a son of Abraham, as our Saviour divinely argues, he would have done the works of Abraham. The only relation that will be acknowledged by Abraham is, to resemble him in his works ; in his trust in God, in his hospitality and bounty to his fellow creatures : *for many shall come from the east and west, and sit down with Abraham in the kingdom of God, while the children by inheritance shall be cast into outer darkness ; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Neither let us value ourselves, as they did, on the externals of religion, for the kingdom of God is within us ; it is charity and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. If you would lay hold of the glorious promises of Christianity, take heed that ye adopt not the manners of Heathens ; consider all the advantages of this life, merely as means to lead you to the lasting happiness of another ; and, to use the nervous expression of an apostle, *let us count them all as dung, that we may gain Christ, and live with him in his kingdom for ever and ever.*

SECTION XI.

FROM THE

SERMONS of MATTHEW HORBERY, D. D.

Late FELLOW of MAGDALEN COLLEGE, RECTOR of STANLAKE,
OXFORDSHIRE, and CANON RESIDENTIARY of LITCHFIELD.

SERMON I.

The Doctrine of Divine Grace
stated and explained.

JOHN, iii. 8.

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

THE doctrine, which is taught by our Saviour in this chapter, seems to be as great a paradox to some people in our days, as it was to Nicodemus in his own. When they hear any mention made of the operations of the holy Spirit, and the assistances of divine grace, they are apt to ask, with that Master of Israel, How can these things be? How is this consistent with human liberty and moral virtue? Is not this reducing religion into a kind of charm, which operates in a manner for which we cannot account; and converting men into machines, which do not act themselves, but are only acted upon by the arbitrary force of a superior being? If our Saviour were now alive, and had to do with such persons as these, he would probably endeavour to abate their wonder, and increase their faith, in the words immediately before the text; *Marvel not, that I said unto you, ye must be born again; there is an absolute necessity for something more, than what is conveyed by a natural generation, in order to renew and restore your nature: for that which is born of the flesh, is flesh; seeks and minds only the things of the flesh; and that which is born*

of the Spirit, is Spirit; is a principle of a higher life, and leads men to mind the things of the Spirit. And though there may be something intricate and mysterious in the operation, by which this new birth is effected, yet that is no reasonable objection to the truth of it, which is sufficiently plain, from its fruits and effects. Just as in the case of the wind; which, however abstruse the philosophy thereof may be, as to its origin, nature, and direction, is yet plainly proved to be a very real, and a very powerful thing, by the sound, and other sensible effects, which usually attend it: the wind bloweth where it listeth, &c.

It seems evident, from this short illustration of our Saviour's reasoning, that this first baptismal regeneration is wrought in us by the influence of the blessed Spirit. He then plants in our nature a seed of life, which, if carefully cultivated afterwards, will spring up unto righteousness and immortality. But whether this seed is constantly cherished by the same heavenly influence, or whether our nature, thus renewed, is itself sufficient, by its own powers, to bring it to perfection, is still a question; for the resolution whereof we must seek in other Scriptures. Men have run into great extremes on this head. The Pelagians of old are said to have magnified, above measure, and beyond truth, the freedom of human will, and the integrity of human nature; and, by consequence, at least, to have denied the doctrine of divine grace. And this seems to be too much the temper of some writers of our own times. On the other hand, the Calvinists, and perhaps some others, are charged with giving too dis-

advantageous an idea of our nature and condition; and, in order, as they thought, to do honour to the grace of God, to have represented it as being given in such an irresistible degree (whenever it is given to any effectual purpose), as to destroy both liberty and virtue. It would be a tedious, and perhaps an useless employment, to pretend to unravel the perplexities of these different schemes; and therefore, without concerning myself with the endless objections of either, I shall endeavour to establish the general doctrine, in a manner, to which, I hope, no reasonable exception can be made. In order to this, I shall,

First, propose the doctrine itself.

Secondly, shew its foundation in the word of God.

Thirdly, mention the limitations and restrictions, under which it ought to be admitted.

Fourthly, obviate the ill uses which may be made of it; and,

Fifthly, specify the good ends which it naturally promotes.

I. The doctrine is this; that the Holy Ghost, by a secret operation on men's minds, disposes them to the love, and assists them in the practice, of virtue. This influence is commonly called grace: which term, though it may have various acceptations in Scripture, and particularly sometimes stand for the virtues themselves (as when we speak of the graces of the Christian life), in which sense it is itself an effect; yet, in the argument which we are now upon, it must be considered as a cause; as something which, in its proportion, produces those effects of righteousness and holiness, and every virtue, which are therefore called the *fruits of the Spirit*. (Gal. v. 22.) The necessity of this gracious influence, or, as our church scruples not to call it, *this inspiration of the holy Spirit* (Commun. Service), arises from the weakness and corruption of our nature; from the number, variety, and power of temptations, of the world, the flesh, and the devil, compared with the nature of religion, and the difficulties which attend the practice of our duty. From a view of these things together, men have often thought, that they needed some assistance; and Christians in particular have persuaded themselves, that they are taught to expect it, from and by the operations of the holy Spirit, whose distinct peculiar of-

fice, as they apprehend, is to *sanctify all the elect people of God*. (Ch. Catech.) This is a brief account of the doctrine which has been usually taught in the Christian church; but which some writers of great note (as was before intimated) have treated with a great degree of reservedness. If it can be defended, it ought; if not, let it be given up.

II. The foundation, which this doctrine has in the word of God, will appear, either from direct assertions of it, or from express promises of assistance, or from directions given concerning it. If the word of God affords us instances in any one of those ways, and much more if it supplies us with instances of them all, they who believe this word of God must consequently receive this doctrine of it as true and useful. Our Saviour directly asserts in the context, that *except a man be born of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*. Here, therefore, the new birth, which is the first step in the new life, and without which no man can become a new creature, is directly ascribed to the secret influence and operation of the holy Spirit. The same thing is asserted by St. Paul; *God, says he, according to his mercy, saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost*. (Titus, iii. 5.) The growth and increase of this new life, and the progress which the Christian makes in it, i. e. in plain terms, all the virtues and good qualities, all the habits of goodness, and that practice of universal holiness, to which our religion calls us, is uniformly, through the whole tenor of Scripture, ascribed to the same cause. *The love of God*, which appears in keeping all his commandments, *is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us*. (Rom. v. 5.) *If we mortify the deeds of the body, it is through the Spirit* (Rom. viii. 13.); *if we be filled with all joy and peace in believing, it is through the power of the Holy Ghost*. (Ib. xv. 13.) Our sanctification is represented as his work, in places too numerous to be mentioned. It is asserted as directly as, in a few plain words, it can be, that *the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities*. (Ib. viii. 26.) And even where we are exhorted to *work out our own salvation* with the greatest care and solicitude, it is pressed upon us by this consideration, that *God, by the agency and operations of his holy Spirit, worketh in us*, both

to *will and to do of his good pleasure.* (Phil. ii. 12, 13.) More effectually to carry on this gracious work, his delight is with the children of men, and, in a peculiar manner, he dwells in them. Know ye not, that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God (1 Cor. vi. 19.)? Know ye not, that ye are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you (1 Cor. iii. 16.)? Questions these, which carry in them even more than direct assertions; as they intimate, that it is scarce possible, at least that it is a shame, for any Christian to be ignorant of this plain and important point. These are only some of the many passages in Scripture, in which the doctrine of divine assisting grace is inculcated; to which I need add no more, but that plain and full declaration of St. Paul: *Now, if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his.* (Rom. viii. 9.)

The foundation, which this doctrine has in the word of God, appears likewise from express promises of assistance contained in it. *I will pray the Father,* says Christ (comforting his disciples, under the apprehensions of his own departure from them), *and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.* (John xiv. 16, 17.) In which promise, though the degree of divine influence and inspiration was peculiar to the Apostles, yet the promise itself belongs, not only to those that were near, but also to those that were afar off; even to as many as should believe on his name. For this comforter was to *abide with them for ever*; in the same sense in which our Saviour promises in another Evangelist; *Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.* (Matt. xxviii. 20.) And, *If a man (if any man, to the end of the world) will love me and keep my words, my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.* (John, xiv. 23.) There is the like promise of the Spirit to them that ask for him, in the eleventh chapter of St. Luke; where our Saviour teaches his disciples how to pray, and urges the duty upon them, from the example of human parents; who, if their children ask bread, do not give them a stone; or, if they ask a fish, will not for a

fish give them a serpent. *If ye then, says he, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to them that ask him?* (Ver. 13.)

The directions, which are given in Scripture, with relation to the Spirit and his gifts, shew likewise the foundation, which the doctrine has in the word of God; and are, in effect, so many promises of assistance, if these directions be faithfully observed. Of this kind is that of St. James; *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.* (Ch. i. 5, 6.) For this wisdom is at least one of the manifold gifts of grace, if it does not rather comprehend them all; for *the wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated; full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.* (James, iii. 17.) Of this kind also are the directions *not to quench the Spirit* (Thess. v. 19.), and *not to grieve him* (Ephes. iv. 30.), either by idleness, or pride, or vice; by a careless inattention to the good thoughts and desires, which he puts into our minds, or by a wilful opposition to them. Our Saviour himself has annexed the holy Spirit to the duty of prayer: and, in consideration that *Jesus the Son of God was in all points tempted, like as we are, but is now passed into the heavens* (from whence he is both able and willing to distribute those gracious influences, which he purchased for us by his own blood), St. Paul directs us to *come boldly, i.e. in full assurance of faith, unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.* (Heb. iv. 16.)

III. Thirdly, If men had always expressed themselves upon this subject with the same accuracy, which the Apostle uses here, and been content with asserting the doctrine of *grace to help in time of need*, my next particular would have been superseded; which is, to mention the limitations and restrictions, under which this doctrine ought to be admitted. And the first and great one of all is, that it be admitted in no sense, but what is consistent with our nature, and the nature of virtue, so as to leave us men and moral agents. In this respect, therefore, the allusion in the text was not designed to hold. The agency of the Spirit is not like the impetuosity of the wind, which *rends the mountains,*

stains, and breaks in pieces the rocks (1 Kings, xix. 11, 12.), and carries every thing before it, with a force not to be resisted. He works in a gentle persuasive way, and is found in the still small voice of reason and conscience. His operations are the operations of mind on mind; and if created, if human spirits can influence each other, by arguments, by advice, by monition and persuasion, cannot that infinite Spirit, who not only knows, but fashioned all the hearts of the children of men, influence them likewise, guide them by his counsel, and assist them by his grace, and yet leave them in possession of their liberty? *He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?* (Psal. xciv. 9.) And he that imparted to men all the powers, and all the means of intercourse with each other, shall he be debarred all intercourse and communication with them? We depend upon God for the preservation of our natural life: his presence and his power support us in our being; his arm upholds and strengthens us in every action; *in him we live, and move, and have our being.* (Acts, xvii. 28.) Yet, notwithstanding this natural influence, perpetually issuing from the throne of God, we enjoy a perfect freedom, a liberty which we always can, and which we too often do, abuse to the purposes of sin. And, in like manner, though we are supported and assisted through the whole progress of our spiritual life, by those influences which perpetually flow from the throne of grace, we are still free, and at liberty (and too often use that liberty) to defeat them all, thereby rendering *sin* itself more *exceeding sinful*. (Rom. vii. 13.) And, as the doctrine of divine preservation gives men no encouragement, in ordinary cases, to cast all their care upon God; as if he would feed them as he does *the fowls of the air, which neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns*, and, as if he would clothe them, as he does *the lilies of the field, which neither toil nor spin* (Matt. vi. 26. 28.); so neither should the doctrine of divine grace encourage them to rely solely upon that, as if every thing was to be wrought in them, and for them, without the least care or endeavours of their own. They, therefore, who pretend to expect assistance of such a kind, or in such a degree, as destroys their natural liberty, and supercedes their own endeavours (which indeed is no assistance at all,

but plain violence and force), and they who pretend to look for no assistance, but disclaim it all, under pretence, that it is inconsistent with liberty, and religion and virtue, are both equally to be condemned. The just temper, in this matter, seems to lie between these extremes, which at once ascribes to God the honour of his grace, and leaves to men the praise of doing well.

The restriction above mentioned regards us, as we are men, and moral agents: there is another, which concerns us as Christians of those latter ages, in which Christianity is already planted, and the professors of it no longer exposed to persecution. And this will prevent us from deceiving ourselves by such promises (if any such there be), as had relation to times, which had need of more plentiful communications. As we are not now to expect the spiritual gifts, which enabled the Apostle to plant the gospel, so neither should we expect the spiritual consolations, which supported the martyr in his sufferings for it. These were favours peculiar to the times which wanted them; favours, which, because they never experienced, some men are too apt to disbelieve. But there is very little foundation for any doubt of this kind: for those great illapses of the Spirit, those raptures and illuminations, were vouchsafed to the primitive Christians, and are withheld from the present, for the same reason, and upon the same account; viz. because God gives his grace to help only in time of need, and in such proportion as is needful. Unless, therefore, our circumstances are the same, and our trials as severe, as were those of the first Christians, we have no reason to expect the same extraordinary, the same miraculous, influences of the Spirit. It is by the grace of God, that we are what we are; that we are men, and Christians, endued with liberty and reason, and have only the common trials and temptations of life to pass through: it seems, therefore, to follow, that we should only desire further, that God would be pleased to bless, direct, and assist us, in the common methods of his Providence, and give us such a portion of his good Spirit, as is agreeable to our nature, and suitable to the circumstances in which we are placed. But there is no reason in the nature of the thing, and no foundation in the word of God, for those strong impressions, those rap-

turous

turous sensations of grace, those visions, and ecstasies, and illuminations, to which some have pretended. If men would not be imposed on in this affair, they ought to examine rather what they do, than what they feel; for inward feelings may be nothing else, but the effects of a disordered head, or the workings of a warm imagination. *But whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; whosoever is born of God, overcometh the world; and he that doth righteousness, is righteous.* (1 John, iii. 9. and v. 4. and iii. 7.) Yet there is no occasion, perhaps, after all, to confine the operations of the Spirit to one faculty, and to suppose, that they are always, and only, addresses to the reason of men. For reason is not the part in our nature which wants chiefly to be restored. The great source of corruption lies in the appetites and the will; and it is not so much the weakness of reason, as the strength of concupiscence, that leads us into ruin. And therefore, to be a counterbalance to this force of concupiscence, which is the love of sensual good, it is by no means absurd to suppose, that the holy Spirit may draw men, by sensations of delight, to the love of that which is spiritual. Nor will this appear any infringement of our liberty, if it be considered, that our liberty is weakened and impaired by concupiscence; and that, therefore, there is need of this taste of pleasure to recover it, and restore us to its free and unrestrained use, with regard to spiritual objects. It is to little purpose, how clear the light is, wherein we see our duty, if our hearts, through corruption, be insensible to the love of it; and consequently, if the influence of the Spirit be excluded here, it is excluded from that part of us, which seems chiefly to require his holy inspiration.

IV. Fourthly, The doctrine admitted under these restrictions, does not seem capable of being easily abused. But, in general, ill uses have been, and ill uses may be, made of it again; which, therefore, it may not be inexpedient to point out. This doctrine, then, is grievously abused, when it is made to serve the purposes either of enthusiasm, or carelessness, or sin. And it is made to serve the purposes of enthusiasm, when, under pretext thereof, any persons pretend to such favours and communications from above, as Christians, in ordinary cases, have no reason to

expect. And they may be sure, that all favours are of this kind, which are not absolutely needful, or at least, in a high degree, profitable to salvation. The natural reason of men, and the written word of God, when rightly employed and used, are a sufficient guide to duty. All immediate inspirations, therefore, all new visions and revelations, as from the Lord, are enthusiastic pretences. But the most fatally pernicious pretence of this kind is, when men, under the influence of such persuasions, think themselves at liberty to dispense with the eternal rules of righteousness, and to contradict the plain express laws of the everlasting gospel. *This persuasion cometh not of him that hath called* (Gal. v. 8.) *us, this wisdom descendeth not from above; but if there be any thing more than what is earthly and sensual, it is devilish.* (James, iii. 15.)

This doctrine of grace may moreover be abused to the purposes of carelessness and sloth; and it really is so, when, instead of exerting their own endeavours, men only wait for the influence of the Spirit, which will some time, they hope, convert them, as in a moment, without preparation, without prayer, without any diligence of their own. But they may as well expect, that the Holy Ghost should descend suddenly, as with the sound of a rushing mighty wind, as that he should convert them in this irresistible manner; and without their own care and endeavours, deliver them like them that dream. No, he imparts his grace, as it were, in number, weight, and measure; and to such as make a good use and improvement of those degrees of it, which are already conferred upon them, more shall be given, till at length they have abundance.

But the vilest, the most ungrateful abuse, is made of this doctrine, when, under the cover of it, men justify, or at least excuse themselves, in the known practice of sin. This they do, either when they live in the habit of any vice, pretending that, as yet, they have not grace sufficient to resist it; or more professedly, when they continue in sin, that grace may abound (Rom. vi. 1.), may appear more glorious at last, in the victory over such confirmed and inveterate habits. This turning the grace of God into an argument for immorality, is sure the highest way of grieving that holy Spirit, who is the giver of it; and

and as to ourselves, is making that which should have been for our wealth, become unto us an occasion of falling.

V. Fifthly, We make a good use of this doctrine, when we suffer it to answer those ends, which it seems in itself naturally calculated to promote. One of these is devotion, or application to God in prayer, and in all other methods, which he has appointed as the means of peace, or channels through which to convey it. Nothing is more destructive of true piety, than that affectation of self-sufficiency, which destroys or interrupts the intercourse between God and us. And, by a contrary rule, whatever opens the way to a frequent communication with our Maker, whatever leads us to it, and encourages us in it, cannot but be a doctrine of great practical importance. Now it is plain, without any enlargement, that the doctrine of Divine Grace is of this kind. For this teaches us at once, that we can do nothing without the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, and yet that this Spirit will not be given but to those that ask him; that, ask him with earnestness and importunity, and seek him in diligent prayer. In like manner, and upon the same account, this doctrine must naturally excite us to make a regular and religious use of all the established means of grace. We cannot, with any consistency, neglect the study of the Scriptures, if we believe that a secret influence goes along with it, above what we have reason to expect from any human writings. We cannot, with any consistency, neglect the assemblies for Christian worship, if we believe that Christ himself is in the midst of them, distributing those favours of his gracious presence, which may elsewhere, perhaps, be sought in vain. We cannot, with any consistency, neglect the Christian sacraments, if we believe, that besides the outward and visible signs, there is also an inward and spiritual grace; and particularly, that in the Lord's supper, *our souls are strengthened and refreshed by the body and blood of Christ, as our bodies are by the bread and wine* (Church Catech.). And, in all probability, if we were to ask a reason of their conduct, from those persons who do neglect these things, such of them as are able to give one, would allege, that they expect no advantage in the use of them. What are

these ordinances, that we should keep them? or what profit is there, if we attend upon them?

The doctrine above explained has, further, a natural tendency to promote unfeigned humility. It is true, indeed, the sense of our having originally received all our powers and faculties from God, ought in reason to preserve us from the absurd vice of pride. For, if we received every endowment, and every excellence, which we may imagine distinguishes us from other people, why do we boast, or why are we vain and proud, as though we had not received them? But still it is a further inducement to that most amiable virtue, which is the foundation of all the rest, and the very basis of all practical religion, to consider, moreover, that the free and right use of our faculties, is owing to a secret influence, which is as much the free gift, as much the grace of God, as even the original donation of them. This persuasion, which sets our weakness and corruption so full before us, cannot but teach us to think of ourselves soberly, and as we ought to think. To all which it must be added, as an additional motive to this good disposition, that it is one of the conditions, without which we have little reason to hope, that the grace of God will be long continued. *For God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*

To conclude: The doctrine of Divine grace, when rightly understood, is so far from being an argument for negligence, or sloth, or continuance in sin, that it is a great and powerful encouragement to make us use our own endeavours towards universal obedience. For this informs us, that we are carrying on a work, in which God himself is engaged; and which therefore cannot fail of success, but through our fault. *It is God which worketh in us, and with us, both to will and to do of his good pleasure,* (Phil. ii. 13.) and therefore we are inexcusable, if, under the eye and inspection of such an assistant, we do not work out our own salvation. This consideration, as it may keep the most righteous persons from being confident, so it ought to preserve the most guilty from despair. For their very first attempts towards virtue, in their return from folly, will interest a power in their behalf, which, in spite of all opposition, will be sufficient for them: while they

they are yet afar off, their heavenly Father will meet them, and have compassion on them. But all this implies, that they have some power themselves to lay hold of the hand, which is thus graciously stretched out to relieve them. It implies, that they are not only able, but obliged to answer the end, for which the grace of God is bestowed upon them. And that is, not to render their own care superfluous, but effectual; not to supersede their own endeavours, but to make them successful. And when they thus labour, that they may not receive the grace of God in vain; when they hope to receive the Spirit, only that they may bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; when they strive to keep all God's commandments, and yet *do it as of the ability which God giveth.* (1 Pet. iv. 11.) When they do the best they can, and yet put not their trust in any thing that they do; in short, when they take to themselves the blame of all that is amiss, and ascribe to God the glory of all that is good in them; then the doctrine of Divine grace has had its natural effect upon them, and wrought in them that temper of mind, which by the appointment and promise of God, entitles them to the kingdom of glory. *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* (Matt. v. 3.) There every heart will be sensible, and every tongue will confess, that this great salvation, so much beyond what they looked for, is principally and originally owing not to any works or merits of their own, but to the benevolence and mercy of God the Father, to the merits and mediation of God the Son, to the guidance and assistance of God the Holy Ghost.

S E R M O N II.

The Inspiration of the moral Parts of Scripture asserted.

[Preached at the Visitation of Richard Lord Bishop of Litchfield and Coventry.]

2 TIM. iii. 16, 17.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

THE importance of the argument to which these words direct us, is evi-

dent from the necessity of Divine inspiration, to give a proper weight and authority to the records of our holy religion. For supposing it to be proved that there really is a revelation given by God to mankind, there is still a question to be satisfied, viz. Where is this revelation to be found? And if in answer to this, men be referred (as they must be referred) to the Scriptures; it may still farther be demanded, what security have we, that these Scriptures themselves are free from error? If we say, with the Apostle, that *all Scripture is given by inspiration of God*, one would think that when this point was once clear, nothing farther would be expected. He is equally exempt from the possibility of deceiving, and of being deceived; and his word, like himself, is light and truth, and in it is no falshood, or error at all.

But we seem not to receive the same complete satisfaction, as to this point, if we are only told, that some part indeed of the Scripture, (as prophecies and certain doctrines,) must be inspired; but as for other parts, consisting of history or morals, there is no need, and no evidence of inspiration: in one case, men wrote with great faithfulness, in the other, with a pious intention.

This account of the inspiration of the Holy Scripture seems in great measure to destroy what before had been built up; the inquirer is left to fluctuate in uncertainty; the sacred volumes will lose much of their veneration; the church of God, which *is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone* (Ephes. ii. 20.), will be sorely shaken; and every profane hand will be encouraged to take away piece after piece, till (to speak in allusion to the fate of the material temple,) there will *not be left one stone upon another.*

The revival of these notions makes this subject as seasonable, as it is important; and though nothing new upon it will be expected by this learned audience, yet I trust their candor will indulge me, while I remind them of the old approved arguments, at a time when others are not ashamed to revive the old exploded objections. I propose, therefore,

First, To inquire into the meaning of these words of the Apostle; and then to assert and prove the doctrine delivered in them.

No

No one, I believe, that reads St. Paul's words without a comment, will easily mistake their meaning; or make any doubt, but that he here asserts the complete inspiration of the Old Testament at least, as it was that part of Scripture which *Timothy had known from a child*. The holy Scriptures, or the Scripture, in the mouth of a Jew, or (what is much the same) of one educated in the Jew's religion, and who had no difference with them upon this article, would certainly be understood to signify that collection of sacred writings which was then received, and constituted the canon of the Jewish church. That was the same then, which it is at this day; and therefore whatever difficulties critics may raise, about the time when this collection was made, or the persons concerned in making it; if St. Paul declares that the whole collection was given by inspiration, this point, as far as his authority prevails, seems to be sufficiently secured. And the reason of the case, at least, extends to the New Testament, a considerable part of which was likewise written before this epistle to Timothy; so that, in this view, we are assured that all the Scriptures, consisting of the Old and New Testament, were *given by inspiration of God*.

But though this seems to be the plain and natural meaning of the words, as they lie in our English Bibles, yet if we consult some writers for the meaning of them, they will tell us, that it is only this; that all Scripture, which is divinely inspired, is also profitable for the purposes hereafter mentioned. This interpretation, however, does some violence both to the words, and to the sense. *Πᾶσα γραφή*, in all probability, signifies, collectively, the whole body of sacred Scripture; and numerous instances might be produced out of the New Testament, where *πᾶς* has this signification, and is of the same import with *ἅλος*. However, if it should here be understood distributively, it is still asserted that every Scripture, that is, every part of Scripture, is divinely inspired: though it is not so easy to comprehend how every part of Scripture, singly and by itself, is also *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*. This is a character, which the whole system of the sacred writings deserve; and by all of them together these ends are sufficiently

answered: but that every part alone is of such universal use, is singly able to *perfect the man of God, and thoroughly to furnish him unto all good works*, is a point neither clear in itself, nor easy to be proved.

If to avoid this difficulty it be said, that the meaning is, that all Scripture, which is divinely inspired, be it more or less, is, taken all together, profitable for these purposes; it is to be farther observed, (and it is the main observation of all,) that the text will not admit of this rendering. For the words are not *πᾶσα γραφή θεόπνευστος, ὠφέλιμος*, &c. as if *θεόπνευστος* was part of the subject; but *πᾶσι γραφή θεόπνευστος καὶ ὠφέλιμος*, &c. where the conjunctive particle is an effectual barrier against this sense, and plainly shews that *θεόπνευστος* and *ὠφέλιμος* are equally predicated of the Scripture. But this meaning will be more readily admitted, when the proof is made out; and therefore I may proceed,

Secondly, To assert and prove this doctrine of the complete inspiration of the holy Scriptures.

Only it may be remembered first, that the controversy here is not with infidels, who deny all inspiration whatsoever, but with those, who deny, or doubt of, the inspiration of some parts only of Scripture: the debate is not about the being or reality of inspiration, but the extent of it. Secondly, the point asserted is, that the writings of the Old and New Testament were, all of them, *given by inspiration of God*; not that the writers themselves were, at all times, and in all the actions of their lives, absolutely exempt either from error, or sin. Any defects, therefore, either in their conduct, or their knowledge, upon other occasions, are nothing to the purpose. Thirdly, it is not intended, because it is not necessary, to plead for a verbal inspiration, or for the same degree of inspiration in all cases; but only that they were conducted by some extraordinary direction and assistance, which enabled them always, without danger of mistake or error, to answer the ends designed to be promoted by them.

Scripture is a miscellaneous composition; there are in it prophecies, and doctrines, and history, and morals. The inspiration of prophecy is allowed. St. Peter says plainly, that *prophecy came not in old time, (or at any time,) by the will*

of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Pet. i. 21.). It has sometimes been pretended, that these words of St. Peter are an explanation of our text; and that all the Scripture meant by St. Paul, is only the prophecy of the Scripture, which St. Peter says was not of the private motion, or personal knowledge, of the prophet's own mind, but proceeded originally from the Holy Ghost. But this point likewise is given up by the writer I have now in view; who contends, that there is another part of Scripture, besides the prophetic, which must necessarily be inspired; and that is the part, which contains "certain doctrines, and commands, or injunctions, which reason could not trace out, but which, when revealed, appear to be perfectly agreeable to reason." By commands or injunctions, he cannot here be supposed to mean those, which relate to morality, because his avowed principle is, that all morality may be known by natural reason; and that revelation is not at all necessary to fix a rule of morality. Whether, therefore, he intends the two positive institutions of Christianity, or whatever else his meaning may be, this seems plain enough, that he does not think the moral, any more than the historical, parts of Scripture were given by inspiration of God: "An honest man," says he, "may demand a proof, that moral truths, and historical facts, are the immediate effect of inspiration." The point, therefore, between us is reduced to this, whether the histories, and the morals of the Scripture, were given by inspiration?

That the moral part of Scripture was inspired, seems evident, in the first place, from the text: *all Scripture*, says the Apostle, *was given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*; where interpreters both ancient and modern understand the whole compass both of faith and practice, referring the two first to error, or truth, of doctrine, and the two last to viciousness, or integrity, of life. But determine as you please as to the exactness of this distinction, it is plain the Apostle sets the moral Scriptures upon the same foot with the doctrinal, and stamps them equally with the same character of divine inspiration. The man of God (whether that signifies the able minister, or only the pious Christian,) can-

not be perfect by faith only; nor can the speculative, exclusive of the moral, doctrines of Scripture, thoroughly furnish him unto all good works. But this point need not be rested upon the authority of this passage alone; it will appear from many considerations of reason, and from many other authorities of Scripture.

The great usefulness of moral doctrine, and its vast importance to mankind, will not be questioned. *The end of the commandment is charity* (1 Tim. i. 5.), the end of all teaching, of all instruction, of all revelation itself, by this author's own account, is virtuous practice. Suppose a system of doctrines revealed from heaven, and a long series of prophecy given by inspiration of God; what purpose do they serve; and what end were they designed to promote? They were not given for their own sake, for the sake only of being given; say then they were given for the interest of true religion. But what is true religion without true virtue? This is the great end of all God's dealings with mankind; the great design of that last and best dispensation of the gospel, which is that *grace of God that bringeth salvation, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.* (Tit. ii. 11, 12.) Is it then reasonable to suppose, that less care should be taken of the end, than of the means? Can we imagine, that when a rule of faith is revealed by divine wisdom, a rule of life (of equal importance at least) should be left entirely to the discoveries, or the deductions, of human reason? Shall a Prophet be sent from God, in an extraordinary manner, to declare his will on special emergencies, and on particular occasions? and shall it seem a thing incredible with you, that Prophets should be sent to declare that whole will of God, which is of universal use and concernment, which is the standing law and rule of life, and which to know and to practise is the perfection of human nature?

There seems to be something in this way of reasoning, which cannot well be evaded, but by saying that inspiration, which is necessary in one case, is needless in the other. Prophecies, and doctrines of pure revelation, must come from God in this extraordinary manner; but morality, if it be important, is also easy; is founded in truth and nature, may be traced

traced out by reason, is commonly known, and what God has given us sufficient powers ourselves to discover; and it is neither usual, nor necessary, for God to interpose in cases, for which he has, in his ordinary providence, sufficiently provided.

The foundation of this reasoning proceeds upon a maxim which, as it is often applied, is good for nothing. It is not necessary, you say, that God should give us rules of morality, by way of inspiration. And what then? If it be not necessary, it may be serviceable, it may be beneficial, to his creatures. And does God do nothing, but what is necessary? Is this an amiable idea of the Sovereign Goodness? this, which seems rather derived from the conduct of indigent and frugal mortals, than to suit with the exuberant beneficence and riches of the divine nature? And what instance is there of any thing, pertaining to *life and godliness* (2. Pet. i. 3.), in which God has not done much more than was necessary, even *abundantly* more than we could either *ask, or think* (Ephes. iii. 20.)?

But if this should go for nothing, it is farther to be observed, that it might be necessary, (necessary for some purposes, though not for others,) that the moral parts of Scripture should be given by inspiration. In this way there is an authority stamped upon them, which otherwise they would want. There are but two ways of teaching morality to any considerable purpose; it must be done in the way of authority, or by demonstration. It is plain, that how capable soever morality may be in itself of demonstration, it is not demonstrated in Scripture. If then you take away that divine authority on which it is supposed to stand, what else do you leave to support it? What weight or influence will the moral precepts of the Bible have, if once they come to be considered only in this light, as so many moral sentences of wise men? Would the ten commandments, for instance, be equally regarded, and so effectually engage our obedience to them, if they were supposed to be the words only of a man wholly uninspired? Yet one would think it was not impossible, that so great a lawgiver as Moses, so *learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians* (Acts, vii. 22.), might have been able to do something of this kind himself. Nevertheless, we see this mat-

ter was not left to him, but *God wrote them himself with his own finger upon two tables of stone.* (Exod. xxiv. 12. xxxi. 18. xxxii. 15, 16.) But this is too plain to be insisted on.

It must farther be said, and it has often been proved by many writers, that a complete rule of life is not easily, if at all, discoverable by mere reason. And from some passages even of our author himself it should appear, that morality is a science of considerable difficulty; how much soever he may contend, on other occasions, that it is all knowable by natural reason. Our moral ideas are not innate, any more than any other; "the knowledge of good morals, says he, is not born in every, or any man:"—"But men come at the knowledge of morality, just as they do at the knowledge of other things, by being taught." But who shall teach them? Those, one would think, should be best qualified to do it, who had made this branch of knowledge their particular study. But the misfortune is, that when this science was most cultivated, it became most intricate and perplexed, by the disputes and differences of the philosophers themselves.

When Socrates had diverted their attention, which had almost wholly been confined to the study of nature, to a subject which more nearly concerned them, there rose up sect after sect, contradicting and confuting each other; differing about the very end, the chief happiness of man, and by consequence differing about the means that lead to it. What method then shall the disciple prefer, when the masters themselves are all at variance? and what way shall the inquirer take, when each of his guides gives him a different direction? "Has not every principle of morality, says our author, been as much the subject of debate and difference, as the precepts or doctrines of revelation have? Has not the existence of God; the liberty of man; the nature of good and evil; what is happiness; what it is that thinks in us; whether the soul be immaterial or not, immortal or not; the nature of justice, moral honesty; in short, every point of morality or natural religion, been controverted?"

It should seem, then, that there is some darkness and difficulty in this subject; and if God may in any degree remove it, by inspiring men to deliver the doctrines of

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morality in a plain authoritative manner, it should seem also that this is a design, not unworthy of so wise and gracious a Being. If the rule of life be truth, it is not easy for every man, or any man, to find out the whole truth; which consists not in any particular circumstance, relation, or habitude of things, but in all of them put together. If it be founded in the nature of things, or in the relations which intelligent beings stand in to one another; are all these discoverable, and easily discoverable, even by men of the best abilities? And if this truth of things be (as it is allowed to be) the same in effect, with the nature and will of God, *canst thou by searching find out God, his nature and will? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?* (Job, xi. 7.)

But supposing that all morality may be known by natural reason, and that a great progress was made in this science by the philosophers of Greece and Rome; we are still to remember, that the Scripture-morals came from another kind of men, in a secluded corner of the earth. What was there peculiar in the soil of Judea, that the purest and most genuine fruits should flourish there? How comes it to pass, that all antiquity has delivered down to us but one book, that is free from all blemish, or defect? And yet this book was compiled by various authors, at very distant periods of time: still all is consistent, all is uniform, all breathes the same spirit, all conspires to the same end; and though running, as it were, in various streams, through different soils and channels, yet it preserves its native purity amidst all the pollution that surrounds it; and thence discovers that the source it proceeds from, is the *fountain of living waters*. But what consistency is there in the Pagan moralists, compared with one another? What immorality is there not, considered in themselves? Do not some or other of them encourage self-murder, the practice of exposing children, fornication, uncleanness, and even the sin not to be named? and do not all of them offend most grievously against the first principle and duty of natural religion, the unity and worship of the one true God, by directing men to comply with the idolatry and superstitions of their country? Is any thing like this to be found in the Bible, though the Hebrew Scriptures were written while that nation in general were very prone to idolatry?

It is certain and evident matter of fact, that we cannot take any number, (hardly any one.) of the Pagan moralists, against whose doctrines, in some parts or other, there will not lie very great exceptions. But nothing of this kind appears in the Scripture morals; nothing, but what fairly understood, is capable of a just vindication: so that from the very purity and superior excellency of them one would imagine, that they were drawn up under a conduct more than human. It is true, indeed, they are not formed into a regular system, according to the rules of art practised by men. And in this sense what our author says may be true, "that nothing equal to the Ethics of Tully, or Aristotle, was wrote for the first sixteen centuries of Christianity." But then, the purity of moral doctrine does not at all depend upon the exactness of method in which it is delivered: the systems of these two great men, with all their art and order, were as beneficial perhaps to the common people of Greece and Rome, as the Religion of Nature delineated is to the common people of England. While the Gospel reformed the world, and neglecting the rules of artificial method, and the *enticing words of man's wisdom* (1 Cor. ii. 4.), converted the hearts and renewed the spirits of men, *turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God* (Acts, xxvi. 18.): then indeed the Pagan moral, though it endeavoured to serve itself of the gospel, sunk into neglect, eclipsed by the superior lustre of the Christian: cold and languid were its precepts to a heart inflamed with the love of a dying Redeemer, and an empty lifeless form it appeared, void of all strength and beauty, to those first and most faithful disciples of the cross, *before whose eyes Jesus Christ had been evidently set forth, crucified among them*. (Gal. iii. 1.) Pagan morality is little more than a shell and a carcass, for want of an inward principle to animate and inform it. This mere body may derive its origin from the earth, as the first man's from the dust of the ground; but the inspiration of the Almighty is *the breath of life*, by which it becomes *a living soul*.

These considerations may be of some weight; but to draw this matter to a point, we must attend to the sacred writings themselves, and the testimony they bear to one another. The sacred writings

were, for the most part, compiled by men, who it is granted were inspired upon some occasions; and the moral parts of them lie mingled and intermixed with other matters, which were allowedly given by inspiration of God. Thus, as to Moses and the Prophets for the Old Testament, they were inspired in their prophecies; and can we think that this inspiration immediately forsook them, whenever they begun to deliver or inculcate the rules of morality? They wrote these things at the same time, and in the same page. And is it reasonable to suppose, they were inspired this moment, and left to themselves the next? and then perhaps inspired again the moment after that, in order to foretell some future event? Is not prophesying, in the other sense of that word, as it signifies to declare the will of God, the standing law and rule of life, as useful and as noble an office, as predicting things to come? And why then should not the Holy Spirit be thought equally to provide for both cases, and to prevent any false prophesying in either sense? Besides, any one may see, that the Prophets themselves make no distinction in this matter, but deliver their moral instructions, as they do their predictions, in the name, and by the authority of God, with a—*Thus saith the Lord*, and, *Hear the word of the Lord*. Then as to the other class of writings in the Old Testament, which are chiefly, or only, of a moral nature; they were either composed by men who are known to have had some extraordinary intercourse with Heaven, or at least they were always received by the Jewish church, as drawn up under a divine influence; and they appear to be quoted under that character by Christ and his Apostles, in like manner as they quote the other Scriptures.

David does not only say of himself—*The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue* (2 Sam. xxiii. 2.); but Christ also, the son of David, plainly intimates the same thing: *How then doth David in spirit call him Lord* (Matt. xxii. 43.)? And having occasion to quote to the Jews a passage from the Psalms, he tells them, that it was written in their law. (John, xv. 25.) And when, after his resurrection, he expounded to his disciples in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself, he tells them, in conclusion, *that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the*

law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning him. (Luke, xxiv. 27. 44.) St Peter says expressly, that *David was a prophet* (Acts, ii. 30.); and in a Psalm of imprecation, which has often been the mark of profane reproach, he declares *the Holy Ghost spake by the mouth of David.* (Acts, i. 16, 20.) St. Paul has many allegations from the Psalms, too numerous to be repeated; argues from them in the same manner as he does from the Scriptures of the prophets, and lays an equal stress upon their authority*. St. Paul, in more places than one, alleges the book of Proverbs, and St. James in one place seems plainly to ascribe, what is said there, to God himself. These Apostles likewise bear testimony to the book of Job, and the last recommends it, together with the Prophets, *who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.* (1 Cor. iii. 19. Jam. v. 10, 11.) But there is the less occasion to be solicitous about every particular book in the Old Testament, since St. Paul has confirmed the authority of them all, not only in the words of the text, but also where he tells us, that *Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning; that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.* (Rom. xv. 4.) Every one in St. Paul's time understood by the Scriptures a system of writings, that claimed to come from God. And would he have countenanced this claim, by such a passage as this, unless he had thought, that it was justly founded; and that these Scriptures, through patience and comfort of which we might have hope, did really come from the God of patience and consolation (Rom. v. 5.)?

As to the inspiration of St. Paul himself, no one, that calls himself a Christian, can with any consistency deny it. His pretensions to it are so frequent, and so plain, that if he had it not, he must have

* See the following passages, viz. Rom. iii. 2. 10, &c. iv. 6, 7, 8. viii. 36. x. 18. xi. 9, 10, 12. 3. 9. 11. 1 Cor. iii. 20. xv. 25. 17. 2 Cor. 12. 9. Ephes. iv. 8. Heb. i. 3, to the end of the chapter. Heb. ii. 6, 7, 8. 12, 13. iii. 7, 8, 9, &c. iv. 3, 5, 7. v. 5, 6. vii. 17. 21. x. 5, 6, &c. xiii. 6. It seems clear from these passages, that St. Paul did not consider the Psalms of David as a Book of Songs, that had nothing of prophetic in them. See Five Letters concerning Inspiration, &c. p. 103.

been a grand impostor. He declares, that the gospel he preached was not after man, that he conferred not about it with flesh and blood, or with any of the other Apostles, *neither received he it of any man, neither was taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.* (Gal. i.) What could this gospel be, which was the subject of St. Paul's preaching, but the same which is the subject of his writings? The whole scheme of salvation by Jesus Christ, the privileges and the conditions of the gospel-covenant, the doctrine of justification, though not by the works of the law, either natural or Jewish, yet by a *faith that worketh by love* (Gal. v. 6.), that comprehends all Christian morality, and is the root and foundation of all Christian obedience. This gospel he received *by the revelation of Jesus Christ*, and this gospel he preached *with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven* (1 Pet. i. 12.): *which things* (says he, joining himself with the other Apostles,) *we also speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth.* (1 Cor. ii. 13.) It is very unreasonable then to suppose, that he did not write, as well as preach, this doctrine, under the same divine conduct and direction. Indeed the very character of his writings themselves allow us not room to doubt of it. For they abound with prophecies and doctrines of mere revelation, and doctrines that are themselves a sort of prophecies; as are all those, that relate to the future state of Christ's church, his second advent, the rise of Anti-christ, and the like. So that here, to borrow our author's own observation, "the events, which we see in the world, establish the credit of the Apostle, and prove that he had some intercourse with Heaven; they prove that he was actually inspired." But, then,

We are reminded in another place, that there are some things in the Epistles, which are spoken without any commandment from the Lord, in which the Apostles gave their judgment; and here it seems we have no authority to say, that they did it by inspiration.

The case here referred to, though expressed in this general manner, is only that of St. Paul in 1 Cor. vii. where supposing all to be true which this writer suspects, it only shews, that in a particular point of present expediency, about which the Apostle had been consulted, he had receiv-

ed no immediate direct command from Heaven. This exception, in this particular case, is so far from hurting his general claim to inspiration, that it strengthens it: it shews the honesty of this Apostle, and his care not to obtrude any thing upon the church, under the stamp of divine authority, which really wanted that impression. But, after all, the matter may be wholly mistaken; and the opposition may lie, not between St. Paul and himself, as sometimes writing by inspiration, and sometimes not; but between what St. Paul determined in the then present distress, and the commands delivered by our Lord himself while he was here on earth, obliging all Christians in all ages of the world. And as to this Apostle's saying, in the conclusion of the chapter, *and I think also, that I have the spirit of God*, it intimates no distrust, that he himself had of his inspiration; but is a fine, and at the same time a severe, rebuke to some certain persons in the church of Corinth, who seem to have been as cautious in this affair of inspiration, as some certain teachers now in our's. But to all such teachers St. Paul said then, and to all such now his words may be applied, *If a man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge, that the things that I write unto you, are the commandments of the Lord.* (1 Cor. xiv. 37.)

With regard to the other Apostles who wrote any part of the New Testament, we must remember, that, according to our Lord's most true promise, they were *filled with the Holy Ghost*; who *guided them into all truth, taught them all things, and brought all things to their remembrance, whatsoever Christ had said unto them.* (John, xiv. 26. xvi. 13.) St. Mark and St. Luke indeed were not of this number, but the reason of the case extends to them; and there is no cause to think, that in that miraculous age, when there was so plentiful an effusion of the spirit, these men should be left wholly to themselves in compiling those writings, which are of perpetual use and benefit to the church. Indeed, as both the Jewish and Christian religion are founded upon facts, it seems a sort of inconsistency in the divine conduct, that the Historians, who record these facts, should be left exposed to all the mistakes and inconveniencies of human frailty. God himself was the King of

the Jews in a peculiar manner, and the history of that church and nation is in effect the history of his government. And therefore it seems not at all wonderful, that men raised up by his providence, should be guided by his spirit, to record, as it were, the actions of his own reign.

But I have been too tedious already to engage in this point at present; let me only say, that from the character of the persons who wrote these histories, as far as these authors can be known; from the character they have always born in the Jewish, and in the Christian church; and from the countenance given to this character by our Lord and his Apostles; it should seem, that they are of a class far superior to any human writings. Jews as well as Christians have had other historians who wrote with great faithfulness, as well as other moralists who wrote with a pious intention; yet we see these qualifications did not advance them to the same high rank with the other, nor are their compositions reckoned a part of the sacred volume. It must be want of acquaintance with the Scriptures, or prejudice against them, that hinders us from subscribing to this judgment of antiquity. For to a mind duly disposed to study them, they discover their origin by their own intrinsic excellence. They may not be all of the same usefulness and dignity; nor are any other of the works of God; but in this, as in other respects, resemble the lights of heaven; where though *one star differeth from another star in glory*, yet they all *declare the glory of God*, and proclaim the omnipotence and the wisdom of him that made them.

S E R M O N III.

On Divine Preservation.

Acts, xvii. 28.

For in him we live, and move, and have our being.

THERE is no proposition in nature more clearly and certainly capable of demonstration, than the existence of an eternal, infinitely wise, and powerful cause, to whom all other beings owe their existence, and on whom they entirely depend. And as it is not consistent with perfect wisdom, to give being to creatures with-

out some valuable end and design, we may justly reason farther, that as he originally made them, he still continues to over-rule and govern them, in such a manner as tends most effectually to answer the great ends of their creation. As these truths have the deepest and strongest foundation in nature and reason, so have they always had the sanction and authority of the general consent of mankind. Every nation and people, where there was any order or form of government, had also some profession of religion; and where-soever any religion is professed, there must be some notions of a God and providence. Indeed, Atheism is far from having been the epidemical wickedness of mankind. Amongst the fools, that *said in their hearts there is no God* (Psalm, xiv. 1.), some few have been foolish enough to declare and avouch it; but the world in general has been much apter to multiply the objects of worship, than have none at all, and to believe in *Gods many and Lords many* (1 Cor. viii. 5.), rather than deny the existence of any superior power. This was the state of Athens, when our Apostle preached there upon the subject of my text. *He saw the city wholly given to idolatry* (Acts, xvii. 16.), and so superstitiously fearful, lest any of the gods should be neglected by them, that altars were erected to gods unknown, of whom they did not know so much as the name.

Some learned men are of opinion, that this altar was dedicated to the honour of the one true God, the maker and governor of the world; who is therefore styled unknown, because he is not only invisible, but also incomprehensible by mortals. But whatever the Athenians might mean by it, it is certain, St. Paul took occasion from hence, to discourse to them of God, that made the world and all things therein, who is Lord of heaven and of earth: “who was incapable of being confined within any temple or human fabric; that no image could be made as a proper instrument to represent him; that he needed no gifts or sacrifices, being himself the fountain, from whence life, breath, and all other blessings were derived to particular beings: that from one common original he had made the whole race of mankind, and had wisely fixed and determined the times and bounds of their habitation; and all to this end, that men might be the stronger obliged to seek after

after him, and sincerely to serve and worship him. A duty which they might easily attain to (though otherwise sunk into the deepest degeneracy, and overspread with the grossest darkness) he everywhere affording such palpable evidences of his own being and providence, that he seemed to stand near, and touch us; it being entirely from him, that we derive our life, our motion, and subsistence:” *For in him we live, and move, and have our being.*

The Apostle does not mean this in the Pantheistic sense, as if God was the only substance in the universe, and we and all other things whatsoever existed in him, as parts, or portions, or modifications, of his substance. On the contrary, he plainly distinguishes between the maker and the work; and is so far from thinking, that the universe, or whole system of beings, is the only God, that according to his doctrine, they are the creatures only of his power, still entirely dependent upon his will, and all the rational and free part of them accountable to him for their actions. We are not parts or members of God, but we are his offspring, whom he hath freely produced into being; and we do not necessarily exist in his substance, but are graciously preserved by his power and goodness; who as he at first conferred being on us, is still intimately near to support us in it, and gives us life, and breath, and all things.

For the clearer apprehension of this subject, it is usually distinguished into divine preservation, strictly so called, co-operation or concurrence, and government. Preservation is that act of Providence, by which all things are supported and upheld in their existence; or the continuing to them that being which the act of creation conferred. And it has been a maxim generally received, that preservation is not an action really distinct from creation, but (*creatio quasi continuata*) a sort of continued creation. And in a qualified sense this is certainly true. But there is no necessity to understand it so, as to conclude from hence, that creatures have any natural tendency to annihilation; as if a state of existence was a state of violence to them, and that they would of themselves fall back again every moment into nothing, unless prevented by some positive act of preservation. That dependence is included in the idea of a creature, is a point which will hardly be denied. But the question is, what is to

be understood by this dependence, and how far does it extend? It is certainly in the power of God to annihilate the creatures he has made, at any time, whenever he pleases. But to say that in that case no positive act of power need be exerted, because nothing is produced, seems to be a mere quibble upon the word. Here is certainly a very strange and wonderful effect, a passage from being to nothing, a change from existence into nothing. To produce such a change as this, seems to be above the power of any created nature. No creature can annihilate itself; no creature can annihilate another. It is the sole privilege of that Omnipotence, which first gave them being, to be able to take it away. And his not taking it away, and reducing them again into nothing, which is every moment in his power, is called his negative preservation. What positive act or influx of power, over and above this, is necessary to sustain them, is a point which perhaps we are not able to determine. But it seems most probable, that they are upheld in their existence by the general and ordinary concurrence of Providence, and as they have no tendency to annihilation in themselves, will continue to exist, in some shape or other, for ever; unless God puts a period to their being, by an extraordinary exercise of his power. But this is a sort of metaphysical speculation, to which possibly the words of the Apostle do not extend. He is speaking not of the mere existence of things in general, but of the preservation of mankind in that order, and rank, and condition of life and being in which it pleased God at first to create him. *In him, i. e. in and by God, we men live, and move, and have our being;* as certain also of your own (the Heathen) poets have said in effect, when they called man the offspring of the Deity. For he is a bad parent, who will not preserve, and cherish, and take care of his children.

And in this larger and more popular sense of preservation, is included also that other act of Providence, called co-operation or concurrence. This supports us not only in being, but in well-being; enables us not only *vivere, sed valere*; and gives us the power of performing all the functions of animal life, and all the actions of our reasonable nature. The human body is a most curious machine, informed and actuated by an immortal spirit.

spirit. The union of these so different natures is a mystery to man, from the beginning to the end. He knows neither when it commences, nor how it is continued; and when it pleases God to dissolve it, *there is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit, neither hath he power in the day of death.* (Ecclef. viii. 8.)

They, who have most accurately considered the frame and structure of the body, the materials of which it consists, and the manner of its composition, the infinite variety and number of its parts, and the hardly less infinite variety of accidents to which it is exposed, have thought it little less than a miracle, that it is not destroyed almost every day. We dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth. (Job, iv. 19.) And yet into how many members, into what various vessels and tubes, and nerves and fibres, are these materials disposed, and wrought up with exquisite delicacy and contrivance? The bones alone are reckoned in number not much fewer than three hundred; very liable, many of them, to be dislocated, or snapped asunder. And yet there is a power, which so well preserves them, that the generality of people can say with the Psalmist, *he keepeth all his bones, so that not one of them is broken.* (Psal. xxxiv. 20.) How many parts and secret operations must concur to animal nutrition and secretion? any disorder or interruption of which must soon be fatal. How nice an affair is the circulation of the blood? how delicate and tender the texture of the brain? This, indeed, in some cases, may be highly injured, and yet the animal may live and be nourished. But then all the actions of rational life are at an end, and the philosopher and the man are dead already. Our whole existence here depends upon the motion of the heart, and the circulation of the blood; and how much less than a miracle is it, that the one can preserve its force and spring, and the other maintain its flux and reflux, for so many days, for so many years together? And whenever *the silver cord is loosed, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern; then does the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit unto God who gave it.* (Ecclef. xii. 6, 7.)

But, besides its internal frame, to how

many external accidents is the body, the life and health of man here, perpetually exposed? To how many hurts and disorders is it subject, from what the physicians call the *non-naturals*? which, though there is no living without them, are easily turned into the seeds and sources of diseases and death; such as air, and exercise, and food, and sleep, and the like. How happy is it for us, that there is a wise over-ruling power, who can preserve us from the ill effects of unwholesome diet and infectious air, from pestilence and from poison, and from numberless evils and destructive accidents, which we can neither prevent nor foresee? *The Lord himself is our keeper, who preserves our going out and our coming in* (Psal. cxxi. 5, 8.); and when we lie down in peace to take our rest, *it is he only that maketh us dwell in safety.* (Psal. iv. 9.)

The last act of Providence included in the general sense of divine preservation, is government, God's government of the world, his disposing, ordering, and ruling over all things therein. As the subjects of his universal kingdom are of different sorts, he governs them by different measures, by power, by instincts, and by laws. I mean not by this to say, that these absolutely exclude one another in their respective cases, but only name the distinction, from what is predominant in each. God governs the inanimate parts of the universe by power; but then, in the direction and exercise of this, are certain laws observed, which result from their nature, or which he has prescribed to his own operation. Laws are properly notional things, which cannot execute themselves, and cannot be obeyed by senseless matter. But God is every where, and infinitely active; and the effects which are every where and uniformly produced through the whole system of matter, are the strongest proofs of their kind, both of his ubiquity, and his power. It is true in strict philosophy, and not merely an idiom of speech, that *he maketh his sun to rise, and sendeth rain on the earth* (see Matt. v. 45.); he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves of the deep; and, when he pleases, *he maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still.* (See Psal. cvii.) But as mankind would be perpetually bewildered and at a loss, unless there were something of an established constitution and course of nature,

nature, so, though *God does whatever he pleases, both in heaven and in earth, and in the sea, and in all deep places* (Psal. cxxxv. 6.), yet his actions are under the wisest regulation; and to the whole series and subordination of second causes, to all the motions of matter, and all the instruments concerned in working the grand machine of nature, he has prescribed a law, which shall not be broken.

It is a law of a similar nature, which influences the actions of mere animals. They are directed to preserve themselves, and multiply their kind, by a principle, which, if it must be called reason, ought to be considered as the reason of God. *The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests* (Matt. viii. 20.); but those of the same species, in the same climate, always build them of the same materials, and in the same form. That universal sameness and uniformity in all their operations, shews plainly, that their instinct is different from reason; or if it be reason, it is a reason foreign to them, of which they have not the proper exercise and free direction. For the productions of reason, under the management of those who have the full exercise of it, are diversified to an almost infinite variety. If we know not perfectly and positively what instinct is, yet, negatively, we know what it is not; and it serves sufficiently to distinguish the tribes of brute animals from mere machines, on the one hand, and from rational creatures on the other. In consequence of this natural law, *the young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God* (Psal. civ. 21.): *he giveth to the beast his food, and feedeth the young ravens that call upon him.* (Psal. cxlvii. 9.)

But the proper subjects of moral government are intelligent and free creatures, who are qualified by their reason to know their duty, and by their liberty, to discharge it. If the notions asserted in this discourse have any foundation in truth, God's right to govern mankind can hardly be contested. His creation of them at first, and his continual preservation of them, give him such a property in them, and right of dominion over them, that his will, always directed by wisdom and goodness, is their sovereign law. From hence arises an immediate obligation to obedience, and from this, the supposition of rewards and punish-

ments. If you ask how this will can be discovered, and made known to men, the answer is ready—by reason partly, and partly by divine revelation. In the nature and constitution of things in general, and in the frame of our own, God hath shewed us *what is good*. While just notions of his perfections prevailed in the world, the knowledge of his mind and will could hardly be a secret; for certainly the Father of mankind would desire, that his children should be like him. If, therefore, they knew, that in the Deity were such perfections as wisdom and goodness, and mercy and truth, their obligation to be like him would shew plainly what the Lord required of them, even to *do justly, and to love mercy*; to practise the great duties of equity, benevolence, and social virtue; and the infinite distance between the Creator and the creature, would lead them into the sentiments of piety, and teach them to *walk humbly with their God*. (Micah, vi. 8.) Here is in effect the entire fabric of natural religion; so obvious and so visible, that one would think it must be something worse than mere ignorance and inattention, that could take their eye off from it, and fix it on I know not what. But so it happened; the edifice was soon defaced, and the foundations were almost thrown down. Men liked not to retain God in their knowledge; even to the polite Athenians, with all their light and learning, he was unknown. You may think, perhaps, it became him to remain so still, to wink on at these times of ignorance, and suffer men still farther to follow their own imaginations. I own, I am not of this opinion. It was time now for the great Governor of the world to introduce the new age of it; *to finish transgression, to make an end of sins, and to bring in everlasting righteousness*. (Dan. ix. 24.) O yes, says a minute philosopher, if there was any need of a revelation at all, it was indeed high time that it should make its appearance. But this tedious delay is our grand objection against it. Why did God defer the times of reformation so long? Why did he not interpose before the reign of Tiberius? Philosopher, he did! He interposed *at sundry times, and in divers manners*; he revealed his will to the Patriarchs, and to the Fathers, by the Prophets, by such measures, and degrees, as the ends of his government required, or his wisdom saw

most expedient. And if he did not do all, that you think he might have done, one reason of this might be, to convince such persons as you, by all the history and experience in the world, how little mere reason is qualified to be the sole guide in matters of religion: a point, alas! which you are not sufficiently convinced of, even to this day. Twice, at least, revealed religion, or if that word offends, God's pure religion (which is just the same thing), was universal, in the families of Adam, and of Noah. How long in either case it remained so, or by what means it was corrupted, are inquiries too intricate to be satisfied now. But when, after the flood a new deluge of impiety had overspread the earth, and there were almost as many idolaters as men, God saved again from the general shipwreck the family of one worthy person, whose posterity he multiplied as the stars of heaven. And after several occasional revelations, he gave them an institute of religion, and a written law; which though not designed to be universal, yet gave light to the world much farther than the confines of Judea; and would have done so more effectually still, if the opaque body of men's supine ignorance and stupid prejudices had not intervened. At last, *in the fulness of time* (Gal. iv. 4.), he sent his Son: whose mission, if it can be proved by other arguments, such as prophecies, miracles, and the like, the question about the fitness of the time must lie, as far as I am able to judge, between the wisdom of God, and the wisdom of an unbeliever; and he who cannot tell which of these should preponderate, must certainly weigh them in the balances of deceit.

Indeed, here is the root of the whole matter. Infidels may clamour as much as they please about the proper time of introducing revealed religion, but their real sentiment is, that there is no time proper for it at all. Yet, upon serious thoughts, it seems almost a necessary consequence from the doctrine of Providence, and God's moral government of mankind. Can we think, that the Father of the spirits of all flesh, should give us food and raiment, should send us rain from

heaven, and fruitful seasons, and provide us all things needful for the body, and at the same time utterly neglect to make any provision for the soul; never once afford one ray of supernatural light to those that sit in darkness, to give them the knowledge of salvation, and to lead them in the way everlasting? To pretend that reason is sufficient for all this, is only to argue against history, fact, and experience; and saying, that reason is able to do something, which it never has done, and is never likely to do to the end of the world. A consistent Deist must allow, that right reason has had very little sway in the religious concerns of mankind; and that, excepting himself, and his fraternity, they now are, and always have been, led astray by the grossest religious delusions. Upon his principles the Deity has never in the least interposed, either to prevent these corruptions, or to reform them. With what consistence, then, or candour, can this man object against revelation, that it is not ancient enough, or not universal, i. e. that enough has not been done by it; when, upon his own principles, the Deity has done nothing at all? *Thick clouds are a covering to him, that he seeth not; and he walketh in the circuit of heaven* (Job, xxii. 14.), without ever regarding the errors and corruptions of his family here on earth. Sentiments of this sort, though designed, it may be, to subvert only revealed religion, yet must shake the foundations of natural; and it will not, perhaps, be found, upon trial, very easy upon this scheme to vindicate the doctrine of Providence, to defend the wisdom and goodness of God's moral government of the world, and the equity of his intending to judge it.

Whereas, on the other hand, the principles of true natural religion, deity, providence, moral government, and judgment to come, fairly and fully explained and understood, lead us, as it were, directly to the confines of revelation; and dispose us more readily to embrace the salutary truths of the gospel: to know which, and to practise them, is, at least in our present state, the highest perfection of human nature.

S E C T I O N XII.

FROM THE

SERMONS of DANIEL WATERLAND*, D. D.

ARCHDEACON of MIDDLESEX, MASTER of MAGDALEN COLLEGE
in CAMBRIDGE, and CHAPLAIN in ORDINARY to his MAJESTY.

S E R M O N I.

The Nature of Peaceableness, with
the Foundation and Extent of its
Obligations.

ROMANS, xii. 18.

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peace-
ably with all men.

THE words I have now read making a distinct and entire sentence of themselves, I need not observe any thing of their connexion or coherence with what goes before or after.

They are an exhortation from the mouth of an Apostle, to live peaceably with all men, of whatever nation or religion, sect or profession, quality or condition: none are excepted. We are to live peaceably with all, on the score of humanity and Christian charity. But then this is to be so only upon supposition, that it is possible in the nature of the thing, and also reasonable: that is, that we be not under any either natural or moral incapacity of doing it; for then the obligation must of course cease; not wholly and entirely, but in part, for we are still to endeavour to the utmost of our power to live peaceably. *If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.*

The subject which this leads me to treat of will not, I hope, be thought foreign or

unsuitable to the time, the place, or the occasion. The time, when having peace with our enemies abroad, we have need of the strictest caution to be united in affections at home: the place, the honour, and prosperity, whereof are very nearly concerned in the offices of peace and love: the occasion; the design of which is, for the promoting of peace and order, for composing dissensions, and healing of differences in a judicial way; that we may the better *live quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty*: I shall therefore, without farther preface, propose the following method of discourse:

I. I shall inquire what obligations we lie under to peaceableness with all men, shew whereon they are founded, and how far they extend.

II. I shall consider the particular duties and offices implied in this duty of peaceableness, and therein give general directions for a peaceable conduct.

III. And lastly, I shall apply the general rules to some special cases and instances, particularly to that which the present occasion offers to us.

First, I am to inquire what obligations we lie under to peaceableness with all men, to shew whereon they are founded, and how far they extend.

Our obligations to this duty are very great and manifest. They are founded in the nature and reason of things, are in some sense antecedent to all laws human and divine, and are bound upon us by

* The following Sermons do not stand in their chronological order, having been postponed by accident; but fortunately this circumstance is of no moment to the reader.

both,

both, because it was reasonable and necessary they should be so. They arise immediately from the mutual relation we bear to each other, and the capacity we are put into of promoting each other's happiness; and if we run them up to the fountain and foundation of all, God blessed for ever, we shall find, that they flow more remotely from the unchangeable perfections of his nature, from his wisdom and goodness. When he was pleased to make such a creature as man, his primary end and design (excepting his own glory, which is coincident with it) was to make him happy for ever with himself in heaven; and his secondary was, to make him in some measure also happy here in this state of probation. All his laws, natural and positive, plainly centre in these two, or rather ultimately terminate in the former. From hence spring all our obligations to peace and amity, inasmuch as by the very frame and constitution of our nature, and the circumstances of our being, they contribute greatly both to our temporal and eternal happiness.

With regard to this life, it is evident, that, had we no contests or quarrels with each other, the world would be a much more comfortable place to live in, than now we find it: the earth would be a paradise compared to what it is, and mankind happy beyond expression. Men are born for society, and designed for mutual helps and comforts to each other. Strifes and debates, anger, wrath, bitterness, are very pernicious and destructive, unnatural and irregular; they are the disorders and deviations of a depraved nature from the original rule, beside the primary intent of the kind Author of our beings. Private families cannot prosper, nor even subsist long, when torn asunder by heats and animosities; neither can a kingdom stand when divided against itself, and crumbled into sects and parties. Even whole nations, though united within themselves, if in a state of war with others, are often ruined thereby, and always lose much of that prosperity and plenty which they might otherwise enjoy. This shews the necessity of our living friendly and peaceably, whether considered as private men, or as societies; our temporal safety and happiness, our being and well-being, are bound up in it.

As to another life, the great concern we have therein, and the apparent necessity

of the means toward the desired end, oblige us yet more strictly to live peaceably and friendly with one another. For, how shall any sense or face of religion be kept up amongst us, unless we agree and unite in one common worship? How shall decency, order, and regularity, be maintained without peace and unity? How shall any have the means of instruction, or improvement in wisdom and goodness, unless their condition and posture of affairs give freedom and leisure for it; unless their minds be calm and serene, their thoughts easy and cheerful, that is, unless they be at peace with one another? Hatred and revenge, rancour and malice, eat out the very vitals of religion, estrange us mightily from God and goodness, unqualify us for the offices of devotion and piety, and render us very unfit for the friendly and peaceful society of heaven. I need not dwell long on so clear an argument; every one that thinks, must be sensible that to live peaceably is as necessary as it is to live and to be happy, to be easy and satisfied in this life, and to be for ever blessed in another. This may be sufficient to shew our obligation to the duty of peaceableness and the foundation of it. The next consideration is concerning its extent, which will be easily stated from the principles laid down; and it is of great importance to understand it rightly for the regulation of our practice in many intricate cases.

The extent of our obligation to this duty may be considered under a twofold respect; either,

First, With respect to the obligation itself abstractedly, viz. the end and design of it. Or,

Secondly, With respect to our power, capacity, or ability, of discharging it.

For it can reach no farther in itself considered, than the end and design of it; nor with regard to us, than we are capable of performing it.

1. As to the former, the great end and design of all laws which concern us, as I have before observed, is the present and future happiness of mankind. From hence they derive their obligation, and from hence we must state their measure. By the great law of charity founded hereupon, we are obliged to love all men, and to do them good: this always holds, and no change of circumstances whatever

can

can make any alteration in this general and highest law. By the same law of charity we are likewise bound to follow peace with all men; because this is loving them and doing them good, generally speaking, as has been shewn. But yet in this, which is only a secondary and subordinate law, different circumstances may cause some variety, and make some abatement. It can oblige no farther than the reason of it holds, that is, no farther than it tends to the glory of God, and the good of men. We may, nay we ought, at any time, to break peace in order to some greater good; and so the same law of charity which binds to peace generally, obliges to the contrary in different circumstances. If by disobliging and offending some persons we can do them the greater kindness; if we can reform and save them, or however can promote the public happiness by disturbing their present peace more than by leaving them quiet, easy, and unmolested; then considerations of peace so far cease, as they are inconsistent with piety and charity. I chuse rather thus to state the measure of our obligation to peace, than to say, as is commonly said, that in all things lawful we are to comply, or that we must never sin against God, for the sake of peace. For though that be always a true, and generally a safe, rule to go by, yet it is neither so full nor so clear as it should be, nor does it go deep enough into the case before us. That we must not sin against God for the sake of peace, is no more than to say, that we must never sin on any consideration whatsoever; which is very true, and the contrary would be absurd: but still the great question of all remains undecided, namely, when it is a sin or no sin, when lawful or unlawful, to offend against peace: and this can only be determined in many cases by considering which is the greater good, or which the greater charity, to leave men easy and quiet, or to molest and disturb them in such particular circumstances. To clear this by an instance: It is a precept of Scripture to *rebuke them that sin before all*, and yet we are commanded to *follow peace with all men*; which two precepts may in some cases seem to clash with each other. There may be danger of committing a sin either way, as circumstances may happen: against the precept of peace, by re-

buking; against the other precept, by not doing it. Here, if we apply the rule, that we are not to sin for the sake of peace, it is as true on the other hand, that we are not to sin against peace: and so we are left in an uncertainty. But since the end of both precepts is charity; if we can know in such particular circumstances which is the greater good, or greater charity, to do this or that, we may then determine what to do; and upon this consideration seems to depend the whole case, whether it be a sin or a duty to rebuke offenders in such and such instances. For if it be a greater charity to do it than not, it ought to be done, and not else. Thus, separating and dividing from any particular church, is breaking the church's peace; yet if that church be corrupted and unsound in its doctrines, it is charity to them, to others, to ourselves, to protest against them first, and afterwards to break off from them. For it is for the good of mankind here and hereafter, that truth be defended against error; purity of faith against corruptions; true and undefiled religion against idolatry and superstition. So again, if common swearers, drunkards, atheists, and libertines, go on quietly and undisturbedly in their vices, it is breaking the peace with them to rebuke, censure, or chastise them. Yet this, if done as it should be, is kind to them, to us, to all; and, though a breach of peace, is no breach of charity. Hence a magistrate in the execution of justice, or a minister in the discharge of his function, must venture to disoblige any man, or any body of men, whatsoever be the consequence of it; because it cannot be so bad as that of suffering men to go uncontrolled in their wickedness, and to sleep securely in their vices. The Apostles of our Lord did by their preaching occasion many tumults and disturbances, and were censured as men that had *turned the world upside down* (Acts, xvii. 6.), by reason of the riots and confusions which were every where raised upon their coming: yet what they did, was for the everlasting benefit of mankind; and therefore of far greater moment than a short and false peace. If they had resolved to offend nobody, but to have lived peaceably and quietly in a strict sense, paganism and idolatry had remained still, and Christianity had made small progress

gress in the world. But this would have been valuing peace against the very end and design of it; and betraying the cause of Christ to the ruin of their own and other men's souls. Our blessed Saviour, the Prince of peace, had forewarned them of this long before. *Think not, says he, that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes shall be they of his own household.* (Mat. x. 34, 35, 36.) This was no fault of his religion, which was as well peaceable as pure; but of the men of the world, who, through pride and envy, and other lusts, made the worst use of the kindest and best designs. Our blessed Lord himself had many contests and warm disputes with the Scribes and Pharisees, which he might easily have avoided, if his concern for God's honour, and for the good of men, had not obliged him to engage in them. It is manifest therefore that we ought not, and in reason cannot seek peace any otherwise, than in regard, and in subordination to the general end and design of it, the glory of God, and the happiness, present and future, of mankind. So much for the extent of the obligation to the duty of peaceableness with respect to the end and design of it.

2. We may consider it with respect to our ability, power, or capacity, natural and moral, of discharging it; so far as is possible, and so far as lieth in us.

That it is sometimes possible to *live peaceably with all men*, I think the words of the text plainly suppose; as also, that it is not so always. It is possible for a man of a sweet temper and prudent conduct, in a private station, having few concerns in the world, to have the love and good word of all that know him, and to live many years without so much as a controversy or difference with any. But this is the case, perhaps, of very few, and the instances of it are but seldom; and when they are, are hardly seen or observed. 'Generally speaking, it is not possible for any man, at all times, and in all circumstances, to *live peaceably with all men*.

The wisest and best of men have their failings and imperfections. They cannot manage so nicely and equally, at all times, as never to speak a foolish word, or never to do a foolish thing.—

Troubles and afflictions will sometimes sour their tempers: passions will break out and disturb their reason; and some degree of partiality arising from self-love will cloud their understandings. A sudden heat will transport them; an unexpected accident surprize them. Or, if no such case happens, yet doubts and perplexities will arise in matters of difficulty, and mingle with their wisest and coolest reasonings. Hence, unless their prudence be very extraordinary, and their caution more than human, some mistake will creep in, some offence be committed, a quarrel ensue, and for some time at least they will not *live peaceably with all men*. Into some such principle as this we must resolve the warm debates, eager disputes, and at length open breaches, between very wise and good men; as between St. Paul and St. Barnabas, and some others. Such instances are not to be drawn into examples, but they may serve to very good use when applied to the purposes of humility. They may shew us what we are at best, and may awaken our caution, considering what infirmities we carry about with us; and that neither the dearest of friends, nor the best of men, can be infallibly secure of their own temper and conduct, but may transgress sometimes, either giving or taking needless offence, and falling out with each other.

But were this the worst of the case, or had good men none to deal with but such as themselves, they might, and would, for the most part, live very peaceably; their differences would be few, and those soon ended and amicably composed. But they are obliged to live in a wicked world, which will industriously labour to molest and grieve them: and, notwithstanding their best endeavours to be kind and friendly, will find, or make some occasion of quarrel with them. The humours and follies of mankind are so many and various, their capacities so different, and their opinions and taste of things so unlike, and even contrary to each other; that it is often impossible in the nature of the thing to please all, or not to offend some, however accurate and careful we be in our conduct. What fence can there be against the ignorance and stupidity of one who cannot, or against the prejudice and perverseness of another who will not, understand the good-will we bear him, nor distinguish between love and hatred, between good and evil? How shall a man guard against the misconstructions of envy; the

the ill effects of the spleen; the designs of ambition and self-interest; or the extravagances of pride? How shall he escape, if one shall injure him, out of covetousness; and because he has injured him, hate him, and take all occasions of destroying him? How shall he be at peace, if some be angry with him for being richer, others for being wiser, and others for being better than themselves? or, to name no more, how shall he steer between two contending parties, where he can neither be neuter, nor comply with either, without offending one or both? I mention not the cursed practices of incendiaries, who, out of set purpose and design, study to set men at variance by whispers and rumours, by insinuations and forgeries, by aggravating circumstances that are, and feigning those that are not: these, and many other considerations, may hinder the wisest and coolest of men from living peaceably with all men.

Add to this, what has been before hinted, that if it were possible, in the nature of the thing, by yielding and complying, to please all men; yet we cannot in reason and conscience, as men, or as Christians, comply any farther than is reasonable, equitable, and pious. If therefore any will be so unjust (and many such there will be) as to refuse to be on any terms of peace with us, unless we violate our consciences and sin against God; if they expect to be applauded and encouraged in their fond humours and passions; to be caressed in their vices, gratified in their lusts and vanities, and to be soothed and flattered to their own destruction; if they will not be friends with us unless we say as they say, and do as they do, and come into their schemes, however unjustifiable and unreasonable, wicked or impious; if these, or such like conditions and articles of peace, be imposed, and rigorously exacted of us, how shall we contrive to live peaceably with all men? And yet he must have been very happy indeed in his company, who has not often met with such cases, or does not meet with them almost every day, if he be one of much business, and of a large and general acquaintance. From all which it appears, how impossible it is, even for the best of men, at all times, and in all circumstances, to *live peaceably with all men*. Yet, notwithstanding, we are to use our sincere endeavours to do what we can; and no pretence whatever can excuse us from doing *as much as lieth in us, towards living peace-*

ably with all men. What this is, I am now to consider under my second general head, which is,

II. To shew the particular duties and offices implied in the duty of peaceableness, and therein to lay down rules and directions for a peaceable conduct.

The duty of living peaceably is of so large and comprehensive a nature, and implies so many particulars, that it were endless almost to enter into the detail of them. They may be referred to two general heads, the first relating to the inward temper, the second to the outward carriage.

I. As to the inward temper of mind, two things are requisite. One, that a man be free from unruly appetites, lusts, and passions; the other, that he be endowed with a large and diffusive charity, having a tender concern for the present and future welfare of mankind.

First, The peaceable man must in the first place be free from the dominion of unruly appetites, lusts, and passions. He must suppress envy, curb the excesses of self-love, and above all things labour to mortify and bring down his pride. Every lust, passion, or inordinate affection, tends to create discord, and to sow dissension. *From whence come wars and fightings among you, saith St. James, ch. iv. 1. come they not hence, even of your lusts?* From lust of pleasure, which is sensuality; from lust of riches, which is covetousness; from lust of power and greatness, which is ambition or pride, the strongest and most contentious of any. *By pride only,* says the Wise Man, *cometh contention* (Prov. xiii. 10.); meaning chiefly or principally. It is the pride of the heart which commonly begins and carries on a quarrel, and blows it up to the height; not but that envy, malice, hatred, and other vile affections, have a hand in most differences; but pride goes along with all, and helps to inflame them. This is that root of bitterness which lies deep in our nature, which seems in a manner to be born and bred up with us; which, like poison, spreads itself through men of all ranks and orders; which, of all other vices and follies, is the greatest, and commonest; and of which every one almost, more or less, has a share. It is one of the first things that we take up, and the last which we lay aside. Easy it is to be infected with it, hard to discover it, and yet harder to cure it. Special care therefore must be taken to find out this lurking viper in

in our bosoms, and to cast it far from us. There can be no peace where this reigns. There will be strife, bitterness, and perpetual feuds, wherever persons of proud and haughty spirits meet. The peaceable man then must have a mind clear of all lusts and inordinate affections; but especially of pride, the devil's sin, which made war in heaven, and does the like on earth, and will for ever foment the discord, and fill up the misery of hell.

Secondly, Besides this negative disposition in order to peace, a man must farther be endowed with a large diffusive charity, having a tender love and concern for mankind. This will both incline him to peaceableness, and also fix its due bounds and measures, as before hinted. This will prevent his engaging as party in any contests, excepting only such as are for the glory of God, and the good of men. One of this principle will have no quarrel with the men, but with their vices; no hatred to them, but to their faults. He will never commence a difference, but with reluctance; nor carry it on, but with justice; nor let it end, but in charity. He will not lengthen it beyond what is reasonable and necessary; nor push matters to extremities, but rather drop the contest than exceed in it. He will first consider, what good may be done by it; and next, by what fair methods it may most easily and speedily be attained. In fine, a lover of mankind will be meek and gentle, courteous and affable, just, humble, and merciful, which are all amiable qualities, and make for peace; contributing to the beginning, the growth and the perfection of it. Having thus briefly considered what is implied in a peaceable temper, I come next to shew,

2. Wherein consists a peaceable carriage. This is the superstructure, whereof the other is the foundation. If that be well laid, this will easily be built upon it, and requires only prudence to complete it. It consists of many particulars, as well as the former, which may, I think, be reduced to these three heads.

1. That we give no needless offence.

2. That we take none.

3. That, when any has been either given or taken, we put a stop to it as soon as may be. The two first are necessary for the preventing of differences; the last for composing them; which, though it be needful only upon some failure in the former, yet will be needful

enough, and what we shall frequently have occasion for.

1. I say, the man of a peaceable carriage must be cautious not to give offence when needless, or, when it may innocently be spared. This implies that he be careful to injure no man's person by unjust violence; nor his reputation by reviling or slander; nor his outward condition and circumstances by deceit, fraud, or circumvention. And this is the lowest, though not the smallest part of a peaceable man's character. Farther; all arrogance, rudeness, and boasting, are hereby condemned as enemies to peace. To which head may be referred the being too assuming, and forward in giving opinion or advice, intruding into things above him, or that do not belong to him, and being too hasty in reproofs, or too severe, at improper times, or to improper persons. To this we may add, that he should use great compliance and condescension in all matters indifferent, readily agreeing to every innocent usage, custom, fashion, or ceremony of the age, or the place he lives in: not affecting to be wiser in little things than others his contemporaries, or those before him; not to distinguish himself by singularities of behaviour, or other niceties of small consideration. In a word, in all matters of liberty, he ought to yield and comply, avoiding the extremes of moroseness, rigour, and severity. If a superior, not to strain authority too high, not to carry it too far, nor to choose to effect by threats and menaces, what may better be compassed by milder and gentler methods. If an inferior, not to insist on every nicety of privilege, nor rudely to reflect on, and censure, authority; not to dispute any point beyond what is just, decent, and modest; nor to be too severe in exposing the failings, and prying into the real or imaginary mistakes, of his governors. If an equal, not to affect a superiority in place, nor to be too critically exact in weighing his own pretences and merits; but to be complaisant and yielding in matters of ceremony and respect; in honour, preferring others before him; and in any doubtful case, rather receding from what might strictly be his right, than insisting so far upon it as to endanger his charity. These, and the like measures of conduct, are very requisite, if we would live so as to give no offence to any.

2. Another part of the peaceable man's character

character is, not to take offence; especially in small matters, which are hardly worth a wise man's notice. This, perhaps, is a harder task than the former. Many are cautious enough as to the matter of giving an affront, who yet know not how to take one; the reason of which seems to be this, that civil or genteel carriage, or a carefulness to offend no man, is creditable and reputable, and many would use it for that single reason; but to pass by an offence, or to bear an injury, however slight and trivial, according to the foolish maxims of the world, is thought a disparagement; and so bears hard upon any man who has not a very good sense of things, or has not conquered his pride: and hence, perhaps, it is, that many, who would not willingly be the first occasion of a quarrel, yet come easily into one upon a slight provocation. This is certainly a great fault, and what should carefully be avoided by him that would *live peaceably with all men*. We are to bear one another's infirmities, and to pass by each other's failings. There can be no peace without this in such a world as ours is. The case is plainly thus: The generality of mankind will never be wise enough, nor good enough, to carry on an innocent, inoffensive, and unblameable conversation. Some flaw or other in their humour and conduct will discover itself frequently, which a good man will pass over, thinking it a greater fault to resent such matters, than to offend by them. Some will be foolish and inconsiderate in discourse, rash and bold in their censures, rude and unmannerly in their reflections; others will be as disobliging in behaviour, not paying the respect which is justly due, nor observing a decency, or any rules of decorum. These, and a thousand other such petty affronts and injuries, a man must expect to meet with, who converses much in the world. And what should he do in such cases? Would it not be a vain and foolish thing to resent such trifles? Can there be any end of differences if this be done? Is it not much better to pity and pardon all such slight and trivial provocations? Can all men be wise? Will ever all men be good? Should we not make allowances for education, for temper, for custom, for frailty? Have we not all our passions and infirmities, our humours, our follies, which cannot perfectly be cured? We may as soon alter some men's complexions and

features, as make them change their humour or manner. And perhaps something there is in most men particular to them, which they are tenacious of; and they have as much right to be so, as others have to censure them for it. In these, and the like cases, we are to remember the Apostle's rule, to bear the infirmities of the weak; and though they are neither so wise, nor even so good, as they should be, yet to have patience with them, and not to make them worse by indiscreet and rigorous proceedings. If any are too eager and passionate, give them time to cool, and consider farther: if they are stiff and untractable, wait till they may soften, and become more pliable: if they are prejudiced and prepossessed, have patience with them till their understanding may clear up, and years may wear out their prejudices: instruction and gentle usage may help towards it, when opposition and severity would but rivet them the closer, and harden them the more in them. Let not any man be offended at a few foolish words, or a disrespectful look or gesture. A lover of peace will have so much good nature, as to impute them rather to the indiscretion, than ill-will, of the offender; and so much charity as to forgive such slight trespasses, though really designed and proceeding from some grudge and hatred. Nay, though reproached and reviled in some grievous manner, he will pity the offender, despise the malice, and return good for evil; as a kind physician, when he finds his patient disordered and raving, is not angry with him, but pities him the more, and takes the more pains to heal him. There is nothing in this procedure but what is just, equitable, and Christian. If all men cannot be wise, let those that can, be so both for themselves and others, and supply their want of good nature and prudence by the abundance of their own. Most quarrels might be prevented by a discreet management on either side; as the sending of a challenge would make no duel, were there none to accept it. There are few people so untractable but may be kept in temper by a wise management. Sometimes their passions may be suffered to spend themselves; and then it is only waiting a while, and they are calm. At other times, a soft answer may pacify them, or a smile divert them, or a seeming compliance, or some obliging courtesy, disarm them. Thus the fallies of ill-nature or peevishness, like some

some jarring notes, may, by a skilful hand, be so artfully set and played, as not to hinder the harmony of society, but sometimes to make it even the sweeter. If any ask how far we ought to carry our compliance, and what sorts of affronts or injuries, or how many, we should thus bear with; the answer may be understood from the measures laid down above. We are to consider in those cases, whether we can do more good to the world, or more honour to God, by resenting and taking notice of any injury, than by passing it by: and upon this are to determine what to do. And if we lay aside prejudice and passion, and listen to our reason only, it will not be difficult to know how we ought to steer in cases of this nature. We are to remember, that such reasons as these, we are injured, we are provoked, or the man deserves to be punished, and the like, are no sufficient reasons of resentment to wife or good men. But if they can do more good by resenting the offence, and punishing the offender, than otherwise, then they not only may, but ought to do it. And so much for the second rule of peaceable conduct, in order to prevent needless quarrels.

3. The third is in order to compose them: that, if any needless offence has been either given or taken, that we endeavour to put a stop to it as soon as may be. If a difference is already begun, stifle it in the birth, and suffer it not to proceed farther. This implies a willingness and readiness to acknowledge and confess any mistake committed by chance, by indiscretion, by passion, or frailty; to ask pardon for it, and to offer any reasonable satisfaction, in order to reconciliation. A peaceable man, in this case, will not think it below him to own his fault, though it be to an equal or to an inferior, nor to make the first step toward reconciliation. He will rather exceed than come short in his reparation for it, and will choose with Zaccheus, rather to restore fourfold for any injury done, than to continue it, or defend it. There are some proud and haughty spirits who will never own themselves to have committed a fault, but are sure to make the thing much worse, by pretending to justify it. What was at first, perhaps, but an indiscretion, is hereby made their crime: and they are much more unjust in defending what they have done, than at first in doing it. The foundation of all this is

pride and folly; and it is hard to say whether such conduct be more injurious or more foolish, or whether it makes a man more hated or despised. Be it which it will, a lover of peace will abhor such practices, and will neither be afraid nor ashamed to own that he has done amiss, and to ask pardon for it. This is a point of good breeding and civility, as well as of justice and charity. And considering our sundry failings and infirmities, and how, in many things, in this sense also, *we offend all*, it is so necessary a point of Christian and peaceable conduct, that there could be no easy and quiet living in the world without it. Having thus shewn, in the general, what we may and ought to do, in order to *live peaceably with all men*, give me leave now only, in the

III. Third and last place, to apply the general rules to some special cases and instances, particularly to what the present occasion offers to us. Our differences with one another are commonly of three sorts; religious, political, and personal. The first about religion, the second about matters of state, the third about meum and tuum, or some rights and privileges between man and man.

1. As to religious differences, they are generally the fiercest, and last the longest, and are of fatal consequence to peace and happiness: and therefore certainly ought, as much as in us lies, to be prevented or composed by us. I will not take upon me to say what our governors in church or state might, or should, do in order to it: they have done a great deal, and they may perhaps do more, when affairs are more settled, and men's passions cool, and times more favourable for it. What concerns us as private men, is, so to defend our religion, and to maintain the true faith and worship, by discourse or writing, as not to lose our charity. Religion is a cause that deserves our zeal; and if many will be offended with us for telling them the truth, and not complying with such errors as would lead both to their and our destruction, the fault is their own; we should still, as much as lieth in us, live peaceably with them. Not by betraying the cause of Christ, not by ceasing to *contend earnestly for the faith, which was once delivered to the saints*, not by pleading for amendments and alterations in the purest and best constituted church of any in the world; but by condescending to hearken to and answer any modest scruples, by meekness

meekness and gentleness, by patience and forbearance, *not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing.* This is as much as in us lies as private persons, towards living peaceably with them that dissent from us. Something more lies in them, who have no unlawful terms of communion imposed, and therefore might, and should, give up their prejudices, and submit to lawful authority, and wholesome order for the church's peace. However, considering the prevailing bias, which education, custom, and prejudice, lay upon weak minds, especially when they have neither leisure nor capacity to know better; and considering that mild and gentle usage may possibly win some over, whom reviling and rudeness would but harden and render worse; it is certainly a Christian duty not to upbraid and provoke them, not to be bitter against them, but rather to wait with patience till God may open their eyes, or turn their hearts: to whose mercy we should therefore leave them, and in the mean while take care of our own souls. But,

2. Another sort of differences, near as fatal as the former, and in some respects more so, are those among ourselves, of the same church and interest, our party-differences. How have these soured men's tempers, inflamed their passions, and almost eaten out the heart of Christian charity! I have not time, nor words, to lament the visible decay of religion and piety, owing to those heats and animosities so rife amongst us: the whole nation feels it, and every good man mourns in secret for it. We shall not, I am afraid, find that these eager contests are founded either in a true love for our own country in particular, or for mankind in general; nor that our zeal arises from a real concern for truth, for justice, or for charity. What truth is there in applauding or condemning at all adventures, as well persons as things, as they are for or against one side? What justice in reviling and abusing one another with odious distinctions, and drawing peaceable men into one side or other, even against their wills, and then fixing a black character upon them? What charity in hating and reviling great numbers before we know them; making merit, in a manner, consist in I know not what names, confounding the distinctions of praise and dispraise, virtue and

vice, good and evil? But I shall urge this no farther, considering how tender a point I am now upon; and that though it most of all deserves censure, yet perhaps can least bear it. I shall but just offer a hint or two to well-disposed persons in relation to their conduct, that they may not foment or increase those differences which they cannot cure. The best way, certainly, for private men, is to be as little concerned in those disputes as may be; to leave the government, and the affairs of it, quietly and contentedly in the hands wherein God has placed them; to be modest and candid in their censures of, submissive and courteous in their carriage to, all without distinction: to let angry men enjoy their own opinions; and, instead of employing their time and thoughts about matters, which tend only to stir up their passions, and cannot profit them, to mind their own business; and above all, to mind *the one thing needful*, which is so seldom thought of amidst all our heats and contests, if not about trifles, yet trifles in comparison. While we are engaging with such warmth and eagerness about the affairs of this life, it might abate our fervour to consider how little a time we have to sojourn here, and how great a work we have upon our hands; and of what moment it is to go cool and quiet hence, if ever we hope to find a place within the calm and peaceful mansions of the blessed.

3. And lastly, a word or two about private differences between man and man, and then I shall have done. These are many and various, and would be of dangerous consequence to the public, were it not, that under a wise and good government, when gentler methods fail, they may at length be judicially and authoritatively determined. This is the best human means to keep a wicked world in order: it secures, in a great measure, the outward peace of society, and makes some amends for the want of universal justice and charity. Were the rules, before given, universally received and practised, there would be less occasion for judicial proceedings; but since this is a happiness not to be expected on this side heaven, and that, as the world is now, there could be no comfortable living without courts of justice, we may be highly thankful, that in a case of so great necessity, we have so good a remedy. A peaceable

man, however, will yet be tender of having recourse to a method, that is designed only as a reserve for the last extremity. He will bear some time, and suffer wrong; pass by little trespasses, and overlook some injuries; rather than bring trouble and expence upon, and occasion ill-blood amongst, his neighbours. Small damages may be sustained, and even greater losses may be repaired, but it is hard ever to repair a breach of charity. He will, therefore, though the cause be weighty and considerable, try all gentle methods first to win over an adversary; and if matters can thus be amicably adjusted, and the point secured, he obtains his right, and keeps a friend at the same time, and neither endangers his own, nor another's charity. If, after all, the fairest offers of accommodation be rejected, and he must submit to a smaller evil to prevent a greater; he will still remember to proceed as becomes a man, and a Christian; with no hatred and revenge towards his adversary, with no railing and bitterness, but with an upright intention, and a calm and sedate temper of mind. He will use none but fair and just methods; will suborn no witnesses; nor attempt to practise upon juries; will not disguise the real truth, nor act against it; will seek justice only, and abide by it. And when at length his cause shall be decided by a competent authority, though it should happen to be against him, he will patiently and readily submit to it, and not take upon him to censure the proceedings of the court, or to be wiser than his judges. Or if sentence shall be given in favour of him, he will not insult or triumph over his adversary, but be willing and ready ever after to do him any good offices, and to live in entire peace and friendship with him. With these cautions, and with this temper, Christians may go to law with Christians, and be blameless. Yet I must observe, that however one of the contending parties may be of this temper, yet it rarely, or perhaps never happens, that both are so. For if neither desire any thing but what is fair and honest; if they are both willing to comply with any peaceable measures, and are in perfect charity with each other; it is hard to imagine how any quarrel can arise between them, or, however, proceed so far as to a judicial hearing. There seems to be but one case where this can happen: and that is,

when the matter of controversy is very intricate and perplexed, and the reasons seemingly equal on both sides. Here both may amicably consent to refer the matter to a legal trial, and so finally determine it. And yet even in this case, there is another more friendly and less expensive way, which may do as well; and that is taking private counsel of men learned in the law, and submitting to an arbitration. But enough of this.

Having thus briefly endeavoured to lay down the rules and measures of a peaceable conduct, both general and special; I shall now close all with a consideration or two, to induce us to the observance of them. We are born into a world, where there is no such thing as joy, comfort, or security, but in peace and unity. Histories of times past may inform us, reason may persuade us, or experience convince us, that divisions are always destructive and pernicious, are the presages and causes of approaching ruin; and however some may take delight in them for a time, who were the first authors of them, yet at length they fall heavy on their own heads, and are fatal to themselves. None are gainers hereby at last, but the common enemy of mankind; whose business it is to set us at variance with each other, that he may the sooner, and the more effectually destroy all. Consider, farther, that we are sent into this life in order to a better, and are here only in a state of trial and probation. While we are striving and contending with each other about trifles, the great business of religion is almost at a stand, and nothing in a manner done to prepare for eternity. Life is short, time wears away, and death approaches, and all our great matters are to come hereafter. A few years must end our petty differences: we must sleep in the dust together, and within a while awake to judgment. Then what profit shall we find in all those vain janglings and contentions with each other: beguiled in folly, nursed up by pride, and at length ending in misery, eternal misery? May these and the like considerations serve to moderate our heats, and teach us to *put away from us all bitterness and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, with all malice; to be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as we hope that God for Christ's sake may forgive us.*

S E R M O N II.

The Duty of Keeping the Heart ; and the Importance of it illustrated, from the Dependence of our Religious Conduct, in Faith and Practice, on the inward Frame and Disposition of the Mind.

PROV. iv. 23.

Keep thy heart with all diligence: for out of it are the issues of life.

AMONG the many wise and admirable precepts given us by king Solomon, there is none more worthy of our observation than this which I have here recited. We are exhorted, in holy Scripture, to keep our tongues from evil, and our eyes from wandering after insnaring objects; to keep our feet from going astray, to take heed to our ways, and to ponder our paths: but the shortest and the surest rule is, to keep our hearts; to set a diligent watch there, where all our works and ways begin, and from whence they all derive their moral quality. *A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is good: and an evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is evil* (Luke, vi. 45.): which is the same in effect with what is observed in the text, that *out of the heart are the issues of life*. From thence proceeds all that is blameable or praise-worthy in us: and according as we are more or less careful in keeping or regulating the heart, so will our lives and conversation be better or worse.

By the heart, we are to understand the frame, disposition, and temper of the soul or mind. As the head is sometimes used to signify the seat of reason and thought; so the heart very oft denotes the seat of the affections, passions, and desires. The philosophy of this way of speaking is what we need not concern ourselves with. It is sufficient to observe, that this is frequently, or generally, the Scripture notion of the word heart. Instances are so many, and so easily occur, that it would be only mispending time, and trespassing on the audience, to produce any. Not to trouble ourselves, therefore, with the different senses of interpreters upon the text, the most obvious and natural meaning of

it appears to be this: that we ought, with the utmost care and application, to attend to and regulate the inward frame, temper, and disposition of our minds; for this very good reason, because the whole course and tenor of our lives and conversations, and consequently our happiness and misery, depend upon it. *Keep thy heart with all diligence: for out of it are the issues of life.*

The reason or foundation of the precept is put last in the text: but, in treating of it, it will be convenient to invert the order, and to consider it first. The precept, being a practical inference, may most naturally follow after, as the conclusion follow the premises: and we shall the more easily apprehend what is implied or contained in the precept, after we have seen what foundation it has in the nature and reason of things. I shall therefore endeavour to shew,

I. How the *issues of life*, in a religious respect, depend upon the heart. And,

II. What is implied or contained in the precept of the text—*Keep thy heart with all diligence.*

I. I shall endeavour to shew how the *issues of life*, in a religious respect, depend upon the heart.

All things relating to our religious conduct are reducible either to some matter of belief or practice: something to be believed or done. We are therefore to consider how far either our belief or practice is subject to be influenced by the heart; that is, by the affections and inclinations, the drift and bent of our minds.

1. To begin with belief. How much that depends upon the temper and disposition of the heart, is very easily seen from Scripture, and history, and from daily experience. Our blessed Lord hath told us, that *if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God* (John, vii. 17.); intimating, that the belief of gospel truths depends much on the disposition which men are in to receive them. If the heart be well affected towards them, they will find easy admittance: but if the heart be disaffected, or has entertained any aversion to them; it will be the hardest thing in the world to prevail for their reception. It was with a view to this that our blessed Saviour said in another place, *Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein* (Mark, x. 15.); insinuat-

ing, that simplicity of mind and heart, free from prejudice and prepossession, is highly requisite for the receiving of the truth. How readily did Nathaniel believe in Christ! The reason was, that he was a man without guile: he had an honest and upright heart, no sinister or secular ends to serve, no evil affections to mislead him; therefore was he fitly disposed both to believe and embrace the gospel. But the Scribes and Pharisees were men of corrupt hearts and secular aims; full of ambition, avarice, and pride, and other vile affections. This rendered them utterly averse to the gospel of Jesus Christ: and accordingly miracle upon miracle, and all the other ways and means which an all-wise God saw proper to make use of for their conviction, proved ineffectual. *They loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.* The same, or the like account, may be given of the Gentiles, those that rejected the offers of life and happiness by the gospel. They wanted not sufficient means of conviction; but they would not believe what lay so cross to the inclinations and passions of their corrupt hearts. The case of many who reject Christianity in general, or reformed Christianity in particular, is resolvable also into some evil affection or inclination of the heart. Why do the Jews, Pagans, or Mahometans persist in their errors, respectively, but because education, authority, prepossession, and prejudice, have inclined them to think in such a way; and inclination has grown up into a standing and unalterable persuasion? Why do the Romanists adhere to their erroneous tenets, so contradictory, in any of them, to Scripture, and antiquity, and even to common sense, but that their hearts and affections are tied and bowed down to them by the weight of education, custom, reputation, interest, or other the like prejudices and secular inducements? As to particular men, it would be endless to observe how their affections and passions have often had the greatest hand in their opinions. Ambition and vain-glory, malice and revenge, lust and avarice, have, in all ages, produced pernicious and monstrous tenets. There is hardly any thing so absurd, but some or other may be brought to believe it, provided their affections and passions lean towards it, and become parties in it. Were it not for this, our understandings, weak as they

are, would very seldom deceive us. Ignorance is not the principal cause of error, but a forwardness of judging before we see reason for it; which is chiefly owing to the corruption of the heart, intercepting the due use and exercise of our rational faculties, and driving us on into precipitate judgments. But I proceed to consider, what I principally intended,

2. Our practice: how that, as well as our belief, is subject to be influenced by the reigning passion or inclination of the heart. This may appear, in some measure, from what hath been already observed. For, if the belief or judgment often takes its tincture from the heart, this may happen in points of morality, as well as in any other; and then there can be no question, but the practice will be suitable and conformable to the persuasion. If inclination and judgment, heart and head, both conspire; nothing can be wanting to determine the choice, and to influence the outward practice.

But it remains to be considered, how far the practice is apt to be governed by the inclination of the heart, without the concurrence of the judgment, or even in opposition to it. I am not supposing either an impossible, or an uncommon case. Experience, history, and observation, may too sadly convince us all, that it is neither. Men not only may be, but generally are, more swayed by their affections and passions than by their principles: and principles are of very little force or efficacy, except when they fall in with inclination, or grow up into it. We may observe Jews and Pagans, Mahometans and Christians, Papists and Protestants, Dissenters and churchmen; men of different principles: but the same inclinations, affections, and passions, prevail amongst all: and he that knows human nature well, may pass a truer judgment of any of them, than one who considers barely their respective principles or persuasions. Were we to form a judgment of Christians in particular, from the bible only, rather than from the temper and disposition of mankind in general, we should be widely mistaken. There is the same pride and ambition, the same treachery and deceit, the same luxury and lewdness, the same envy and hatred, the same rancour and bitterness; in a word, the same follies and vices reigning among Christians, as we shall meet with in other

men.

men. It is not their principles, but the disposition and temper, common to them and others, which for the most part actuate and govern them. For can we think, that they do not believe the religion they profess? Are they so many hypocrites and dissemblers, pretended Christians, but real Deists, Pagans, or Atheists? No, certainly, but very far from it. They do believe, and that sincerely too, the Christian religion: they have not any doubt or scruple of it: they abhor those who have: they value and esteem it much: would, very probably, rather than renounce it utterly, even die for it: and they hope at length to be saved by it. And yet notwithstanding live not up to it. The number of Atheists or Deists, in our own, or other Christian countries, is certainly very small and inconsiderable. There are not so many infidels as would be thought so, or perhaps wish to be such. Inclination and impure affection will do much with some men: but yet they cannot always believe, or disbelieve, just what they please. Besides, there is not temptation enough to infidelity, a very difficult thing to attain to in any Christian country. Men can elude their principles with much more ease than they can renounce them; and therefore need not take sanctuary in atheism or infidelity.

Shall we say, then, that Christians, believing their religion in the gross, yet understand not its particular doctrines? That they do not know, for instance, that pride or luxury, avarice or intemperance, treachery or fraud, malice or revenge, is as opposite to their religion as darkness is to light? No. This cannot be pretended. They know these things perfectly well. They condemn those vices in others, nay even in themselves. Besides, it must be owned farther, that many may have learning and abilities as great as any casuist; may be particularly versed in Scripture and morality; may make religion, and even practical religion, their familiar study and business; may be weekly, or daily, employed in instructing and reforming the world; and yet be ambitious and covetous, proud or luxurious, secular in their views, and hypocritical in their pretences. Knowledge is one thing, and grace another: orthodoxy is not probity: a sound head may often be consistent with a corrupt heart. Good principles, therefore, are by no means alone sufficient to make

us good men. It is not what we believe, but what we affect and incline to, that determines us. Affections actuate and govern the men, inasmuch that religion, however really and fully believed, has yet no force upon us, till it sinks deep into us, and becomes the reigning passion of our hearts. This is fact, and the truth and certainty of it is, what we find and feel by experience.

I will not, however, conceal an objection which seems to run counter to our main position. It may be thought that our irregular actions are rather ultimately resolvable into the false judgments which we make, than into affection or inclination; and that the head is first tainted, and then the heart. For, it may be asked, why any man is inclined to one thing more than to another? Is it not because he first believes, or judges it to be good for him? It is a maxim with divines and moralists, that we cannot choose evil but under the notion of good, having a principle of self-love within; and that therefore there must be some error in judgment, before there can be any in practice. This is the objection in its full force; and I shall endeavour next as fully to answer it. It may be allowed, that some error in judgment always precedes every error in practice: and it is nevertheless true, that our irregular acts are ultimately resolvable into affection and inclination; because the error, both of judgment and practice, is owing to the corruption of the heart. The progress of the mind, in such cases, seems to be this. When some sensible good is presented to the eye, or to the mind, the man judges it to be agreeable, or pleasant to the sense; and so far judges right. Yet this alone would not determine his choice, because other considerations, more, or more weighty, might keep him from it. But he dwells upon the thought till his heart is inflamed: then he chooses, and not till then. If he still retained an indifference towards it, as he easily might; if he did not grow uneasy and impatient for it; he would stay and consider, would examine all the consequences, and be well assured, not only that the thing is pleasant to sense, or good in part, but that it is good in the whole, simply and absolutely so, before he chooses it. But the drift and bent of his soul leaning too much towards it, he cuts off all farther consideration,

and is precipitately determined by it. Thus the judgment upon which the man acts, follows the irregular inclination. It is the desire, the impatience, the passion of his heart, that hurries him into it. His judging the thing to be good in part, or in some respect, is indeed antecedent to the inclination, in order of nature; but his judging it to be good in the whole, entirely so, and therefore eligible, is after it. In a word, he believes, that to be best, and most eligible, which he most inclines to; and upon this he acts. Inclination, at length, is the ruling principle; his heart betrays him.

This is applicable in a thousand cases, where men prefer temporal to eternal happiness. For though they act according to their present judgment, and, as they think, best for themselves, yet that present judgment is contrary to their cooler sentiments of things, and proceeds entirely from the reigning passion of the heart. Here then we may distinguish between the habitual and the occasional judgments which are made. The former are what we call settled principles, the work of reason and thought, when the mind is cool and sober: the latter are only particular judgments proceeding from some affection or passion, as temptations come in men's way, or as occasion serves. To illustrate this by an instance:

Any man who looks into his bible knows that adultery, or drunkenness, is a great and crying sin; and cannot but judge it infinitely better to abstain from it, than to run the risk of everlasting damnation. These are his cool and sober sentiments, the habitual and standing judgment of his mind. Yet, notwithstanding, through the prevalency of his lusts and passions, he does the very thing which he condemns; and, by so doing, shews that his heart has betrayed him into a precipitate judgment, contrary to what his reason and conscience dictate to him. Thus he acts against principle, being driven on by a prevailing passion; and chooses, in that particular instance, and on that occasion, what he acknowledges, in the general, ought never to be chosen. This is the fallacy by which many so frequently and so fatally deceive their own souls, by which they elude and defeat the settled judgments of their own minds, and act counter to those good and sound principles which they believe and maintain. This being a matter of great importance,

and well worth the considering, it may not be amiss to inquire a little farther into it; that we may the more clearly understand by what sort of charm or enchantment our inclinations and affections can so work upon us, as to make us judge and act so inconsistently with ourselves. It must be either by our leaving out, or taking in, something very differently from what we do when we form a true and right judgment. Now, the mystery of the case seems, for the most part, to lie in one or more of the three following particulars.

First, Either we think not at all, for the time, of the general principles which we hold, but suffer them to lie dormant and useless to us.

Secondly, Or, if we think of them, we neglect to apply them to our own particular case, imagining ourselves to be unconcerned in them.

Thirdly, Or, if we do apply them, and consequently are self-condemned, and sensible of it; yet we hope to repent, and to be saved notwithstanding.

First, It may often happen that men, blinded with passion, and hurried on by their appetite, may, for the time, entirely forget the good principles which they have. The present object so fills and takes up the mind, that there is no room or place left for any thing else. The man is not at leisure to start difficulties, or raise scruples. The temptation is too near, too importunate and pressing, to give any leave to think or recollect. The mind, in such cases, is too eager and too impatient to consider any thing beyond the present. Thus there being an appearance of good, but no apprehension of evil to counter-balance it; reasons for the thing, and no reasons thought on against it; sense pleading warmly on one hand, while reason and religion are asleep on the other; such being the case, it is easy to imagine how the man must determine. He judges, indeed, right enough upon the present appearance of things: but it is his own fault that things do not appear otherwise. It is his passion that gives the false colour to the object, and he is answerable for letting it have the ascendant over him, so far as to stupify and render useless those rational faculties which God has given him.

Secondly, A second case is, when we do not entirely forget the good principles which we have learned, but only neglect to apply them to our own particular case.

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This comes to pass as often as men content themselves with a loose and superficial knowledge of their own case, or temper; not examining carefully and impartially into either. Partiality, proceeding from self-flattery or mistaken self-love, perverts their judgment; insomuch that they think favourably of themselves, while they do the very same things which they condemn in others; and it contributes very much towards their putting this cheat upon themselves, that they are able to find out some plausible name or colour for their vices.

A man may be very sensible that covetousness, for instance, is idolatry, and highly displeasing to Almighty God; but when the case comes to be his own, he calls it not covetousness, but frugality. Another believes pride to be an abominable vice, equally hateful to God and man: but still his own pride has no such appearing malignity in it; it is, with him, nothing but magnanimity and greatness of soul. A third is firmly persuaded that all rancour and malice, bitterness and revenge, are utterly repugnant to God's word, and diametrically opposite to the genius and spirit of the gospel: but when he himself becomes guilty, he is not sensible of any rancour or malice, bitterness or revenge; he is a stranger to such abominations, washes his hands of them, and calls his own madness a just resentment, for a terror to offenders, and for the good of the world. To add an example or two for farther illustration. A bigoted Romanist, warmed with a spirit of persecution, wreaks his spleen, revenge, and rage, trampling on the laws of humanity, as well as on the precepts of the gospel; and yet flatters himself, all the while, that he is doing no harm, vainly imagining that it is nothing but a laudable and becoming earnestness for his holy religion. A zealous party-man, while he is endeavouring to turn the world upside down, and almost to tear human society in pieces; while he deals about calumnies with an undistinguishing hand, throws his arrows and firebrands abroad without mercy, and discovers all the ill qualities one should expect to meet with in an angel of darkness; yet very gravely puts all to the account of the cause he is engaged in; and thinks nothing can be amiss which may promote the measures and interests of his party.

Such are the false judgments which men ordinarily make, in compliance with their reigning passions. They act against their settled judgment and principles, and are not aware that they do so. They do not carefully examine the pulse of their own hearts: they know not upon what springs they move, nor consider the tendency of their actions. Their general notices of good and evil are right and just; and they can apply them readily to every case but their own. There, partiality and fond self-love forbid too strict enquiry, and prevent the use and application of their principles. As many see no blemishes in their friends, or else invent some kind excuses or cover for them; so these do with themselves. Their faults would be very great ones, even themselves being judges, if they were not their own.

Thirdly, There is a third way which many have of eluding the force of their principles, as effectual as any, and indeed the most dangerous of all. When a case is too flagrant, and too notoriously wicked, to admit of the more refined ways of evading and frustrating the plain rules of the gospel; they have this reserve still, that they hope to repent some time or other, and to be saved at last. This prevails most with those who are addicted to the sins of the body, which are too gross and too scandalous to admit of those colourable pretences that are often made for the more gross and lurking vices of the heart. These men are sensible that they sin against God, and that they expose themselves to the danger of hell-fire. But while they think the danger remote and distant, and that they have it in their power to prevent it when they please; while they have plausible hopes (and what will they not think or hope, upon a principle of self-love, and infatuated by a predominant passion?) that they may enjoy their sinful pleasures, and arrive at heaven notwithstanding: I say, while they think thus, there is nothing in human nature forbidding such a choice; a man may easily be determined so to act; and thousands are so determined every day.

Thus we see how the issues of life spring from the heart, from the predominant affections and inclinations, in contradiction to their standing principles. And there is no difficulty in solving the problem, how it comes to pass, that the ge-

nerality of Christians, with all their reason and understanding, and good principles about them, yet practise nothing less than the rules of their most holy religion. If they had not contrived those or the like ways of holding the truth in unrighteousness, of retaining their principles and their lusts together; then indeed there would be many more infidels than there really now are. For, if affections were importunate and clamorous against principle, and there were no other way to gratify them, and withal to make the mind easy; men would then bend all their aims to work themselves up into a disbelief of their principles, and take their last refuge in deism, or even atheism. Some benefit we reap from the very mischief whereof I have been complaining. We owe to it, in a great measure, that outward form and face of religion which is still kept up in the world. For if the point lay here, that every man must of necessity be either a Christian in deed and in truth, agreeably to his principles, or else renounce his principles, and turn infidel; it is obvious and easy to imagine what condition the world must have been in, long before this time. But I proceed to my second general head:

II. To shew what is implied and contained in the precept of the text: *To keep the heart with all diligence*. Having seen how much depends on the disposition of the heart; the reason and the necessity of the precept must be very apparent; and we have nothing now left to do, but to inquire what it contains, or whereof it consists. It must consist of two parts, or offices. 1. To preserve our good dispositions; and, 2. To correct our bad ones. And these again will each of them imply two other things. First, A frequent examination of our own hearts; and, secondly, A constant endeavour to wean our affections from this world, and to fix them on another.

1. The first part, or office, implied in the precept of the text, is to use our best endeavours to preserve our good dispositions, to keep up and maintain such commendable inclinations as we find ourselves already endowed with. This I conceive to be principally intended in the text. The phrase of keeping the heart answers thereto; and, besides, it is much more in our power to keep our hearts from going

astray, than to recover them when once gone.

2. The second part, or office, implied also in the text, is to correct our bad inclinations, and reduce them to reason. This is a matter of labour and difficulty, to recover a heart, after it is gone astray, to call back the wandering affections, and to give them a new turn. How far this may be within the ordinary power of man, or what degree of grace is required for it, I pretend not to determine, since it depends upon great variety of circumstances. If the heart be the governing principle, as we have before proved, it may be thought a kind of contradiction for a man of himself, and upon his own free motion, to set about the correcting or reforming it. How shall he correct his reigning inclination, without being inclined to do it? And how can any inclination be the reigning one, if there be a superior inclination to reduce and correct it? It comes at length to this; how shall a man be inclined to what he is not inclined to? Here lies the difficulty; and hence it is that we so seldom see a thorough change of the heart; and when we do see it, we must impute it rather to the powerful hand of God, than to any thing which a man is able to do of himself. The inclinations of men (humanly speaking) once estranged from God and goodness, very rarely return, but rule and prevail over the unhappy creatures all their lives long. No arguments have any weight or force with them; no considerations can find entrance; they are deaf to all persuasion, refusing, like the deaf adder, to *hear the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely*. When men's hearts and affections are once gone off to this degree, their damnation is certain; unless it please God to visit them in some remarkable manner, and to give a turn to their thoughts. In the general, we may say, according as the heart is more or less abandoned, so the state of the man is either better or worse, and his recovery more or less doubtful. All the hold that any instructions or advices have upon him, lies in this, that he is incessantly desirous of his own happiness; and though he has placed his affections chiefly upon temporal good, yet some degree of inclination towards eternal happiness may abide and continue with him. The em-
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bers are not quite dead, but may some time or other kindle afresh, and break out into a flame. To come out of figure and metaphor, I apprehend the matter to lie plainly thus: Though wicked men be under the influence of their corrupt, prevailing inclinations, in the ordinary course of their lives; yet at some certain seasons, and especially in the absence of temptations, their enchanted reason and understanding may recover its due force and spring, may represent the ill consequences of a wicked course, and press the consideration thereof close, and home; and they may instantly resolve upon ways and means to prevent any such delusion and infatuation for the time to come. This I suppose to be ordinarily in the power of the mind of man, not excluding the influences of God's grace co-operating with him.

It may be thought, perhaps, that, in what hath been said, I have too much heightened or magnified the difficulty of correcting the heart, and that there is little or no difficulty in the thing. For, since God's grace is never wanting, but when men are wanting to themselves, any man may repent whensoever he will. This I admit. But is it so easy a matter for a man to will what he has no mind to? If the man be willing, the thing is as good as done; but there lies the difficulty. The will itself, the first mover, the spring of action, is the very thing that wants to be set right; and what shall do this? If it be thought that a principle of reason, with which man is endowed, is sufficient for all; the difficulty still returns, how the will, enslaved to passions, shall incline to follow reason. Whoever well considers human nature, and how the generality of mankind must be kept in awe by temporal penalties, or that otherwise the world would immediately run into the utmost confusion; will be apt to believe, that it is a very rare and uncommon talent, to be ever ready and willing to hearken to reason. It is but throwing out so many empty words, to say a man can do thus, or thus, if he will. A man may wantonly throw himself off from a precipice without the least reason for it; or he may put himself to extreme torture upon a rack, without any motive for doing it; or may do things on purpose to make himself contemptible or miserable all his life long: all this a man may do if he

will; he has a physical power of acting in this manner, and that is all; but he can never exercise this power in such manner, because he can never have the will to do it, there being no principle in human nature to excite him to it. Now, though the aversion which some persons have to repentance and holiness of life, be not the same in degree with such as I have mentioned; yet it may be very great, strong, and forcible; and though it be true, that they may repent if they will, yet it may be no less true, that, in those circumstances, they cannot of themselves have the will to do it, nor without some extraordinary grace preventing and assisting in it. However, as I before said, there is always a principle in our nature, a desire of happiness, which may, at some time or other, call men off from their evil courses; and it will generally operate more or less, according as it hath run a longer or a shorter time, in a wrong channel. But, not to weary your patience longer with matters of an abstract nature, whether the difficulty of correcting bad inclinations be greater or less, we may proceed to lay down the means proper for it; and they are the same, in a great measure, with those that are requisite for preserving good ones, as before mentioned.

The first is, a frequent examination of our own hearts. Such as find in themselves an inclination to make this first step, will not, very probably, be much averse to going farther. Without examining, we can never perfectly know what is good or bad in us; what we ought to preserve, and what to correct. It requires serious reflection and dwelling much at home, to understand ourselves thoroughly. We ought to search and examine upon what springs our hearts move; whether our views and purposes be chiefly religious, or secular; and, if secular, what they are, and from whence they arise. When there are several motives to the same thing (as it often happens) it should be considered, whether the prevailing one be religious. This is easily known, by setting aside all that is secular and temporal, and then trying the strength of spiritual motives. Thus, for instance: If any one would know whether he gives alms upon a true Christian principle, let him only consider, whether he takes the same satisfaction in a private, as in a public charity, and his question

question is answered. Or if a man would know whether he publishes any work out of a sincere love to truth, and a desire to improve the world (as every writer pretends), let him think and consider, whether he should be willing publicly to retract an error which might otherwise do mischief; and he will soon perceive how his heart moves. The same method will serve for a thousand other cases. There is another way of discovering how we stand affected; and that is, by observing the stream and current of our passions. As the ambitious man's passions turn upon honour and power, the libertine's upon sensual pleasures, and the covetous man's upon money; so the religious man's passions hang chiefly upon what relates to his eternal salvation. And it will be easy for him to observe, whether he be as heartily sorry for his sins, as for any worldly losses, crosses, or disappointments; and whether he be as solicitous about the former, as he is about the latter. All the passions of our souls are nothing else but so many different expressions of the love we have for ourselves; and it may be seen from thence how our self-love stands directed; whether to this world or a better, and to which we are most strongly and invincibly attached.

A little use and observation this way will soon give a man a just idea of himself.

If he finds his inclinations and dispositions to be right and good in the main; he is next to observe where they are most apt to step awry, and there he is to set a double guard, as it were to defend the weak side. If he perceives them to be solely, or chiefly, secular; it concerns him to discover the reigning passion which gives the law to the rest; whether it be for riches, honours, or pleasures; and this will easily be understood from the stream of his thoughts, the course of his pursuits, and the constant tenor of his life and conversation. When this is done, the last part of this office is to trace the thing up to its fountain-head, to see from whence such disposition or affection arises: Whether from temper or constitution of body, or from education, authority, example, or custom; from the occupation he pursues, the company he keeps, the books he reads, or any thing of like nature. This seems to be the proper order and method of examining our hearts, if

we are desirous to be thoroughly acquainted with our own selves.

When we have thus discovered what is amiss, and whence it arises; nothing remains but to consider of ways and means proper to correct it. Many good rules and directions might be offered to this purpose; but instead of particular rules, which vary according to men's particular circumstances, it may suffice to lay down one general rule, which may equally serve either for preserving good dispositions, or reforming bad ones; and that is,

Secondly and lastly, A constant endeavour to wean our affections from this world, and to fix them firmly on a better. Happiness, in general, we all pursue; eagerly, constantly, incessantly. Thus far we all agree, down from the prince to the peasant. But then we divide in the choice of the means, or of the object; some pursuing eternal happiness, most temporal only, or however chiefly; and these subdivide again into almost as many kinds as the world affords vanities. All the difference between an evil man and a good man is, that the evil man makes this world his chief, or only aim; while the good man makes the world to come his principal concern, and religion is the reigning passion of his heart. The different degrees of goodness depend very much upon keeping the eye more or less fixed upon that, the ultimate end and design of all their labours and endeavours. Such as lean with all the weight and tendency of their minds towards heaven, are, of course, solicitous and anxious to know whether their principles and practices agree together. They will not suffer themselves to be imposed on, in a matter of so great importance; but carefully watch and guard against all those little fallacies which thoughtless men are drawn in by, to make particular judgments contrary to their standing persuasions. In a word, as worldly men are solicitous to secure a firm and strong title to their estates or honours; so the children of light are particularly watchful to make their calling and election sure. All this naturally flows from a heart fixed upon heaven and eternal happiness; and such a disposition once firmly rooted and grounded, hardly needs any farther rules. We easily perceive what we have to do, after we have fixed our aims and settled

our main designs. All the sins and irregularities, either of our passions or our lives, ultimately terminate in our inclination to some temporal good, or aversion to some temporal evil; that is, in our love of this present world. There lies the root and source of all the distempers of our minds. Wherefore, the true, the only remedy must be, to disentangle the mind, as much as possible, from things below; and to seek those things which are above. If it be asked, how this must be done? the ready answer is; by retirement, by recollection, by reading, and especially by praying. This is the way to make distant things have the same force upon us as if they were near at hand, and things to come as if they were now present.

If want of leisure be pleaded by men of action and business, it is a shrewd presumption that they have never yet seriously considered what everlasting happiness and everlasting misery import. However, it is not to be expected that either all, or the greater part, of our time should be laid out in religious exercises, properly so called. A great deal less may suffice. God designed us for action and business: our circumstances here, the health of our bodies, and the vigour of our minds, require it, and can hardly be kept up without it. If the heart be once set right, and the aim well directed; business itself is but another kind of religious exercise, and doing good in our station is serving God. It is the intention which sanctified it, while the end proposed is the glory of God, and the good of mankind.

To conclude: Let us be ever careful so to use, and so to enjoy, this world, as neither to be enchanted nor enamoured with it; always remembering, that it is an introduction only to another, that it will soon be over, and that eternity hangs upon it.

S E R M O N III.

The Nature and Kinds of Sins of Infirmary.

MATTH. xxvi. 41.

The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

THESE are the words of our blessed Lord to his drowsy disciples. It was the night before his passion, a night which

he himself spent in prayer and watching, and he had intreated his disciples to tarry and watch with him. But their hearts were dull, and their eye-lids heavy; and, notwithstanding all their best endeavours to the contrary, sleep stole upon them, and overcame them. Hereupon, their indulgent Master, coming to them, thus gently rebuked them: *What! could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.* Then follows, *the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.* Which words I understand, with the generality of interpreters, as spoken in the way of kind excuse or mitigation of their fault, in not watching at a time when it was their duty to have done it, and when even common prudence required it. One can scarce acquit them of some degree of negligence and want of respect in that affair: but our blessed Lord was pleased to put the mildest and most candid construction possible upon it. The night was far spent; sleep stole upon them unawares; and they were naturally slow and heavy, not apprehending how much depended upon that critical juncture. They intended no affront or disrespect to their Lord: they had a true and real, only not so lively and vigorous a concern for him, as they ought to have had. Their spirit truly was willing, and they meant well; but yet, for want of quicker sentiments, they failed in the performance. It was natural infirmity which prevailed over their resolutions, which over-powered their very hearty and honest, but languid endeavours. *The spirit truly was willing, but the flesh was weak.*

The words of the text have been thought to express, in very proper and affecting terms, the nature or essence of that kind of sins which we call sins of infirmity, or sins of human frailty: and it is under this general view that I now design to consider them, abstracting from the particular occasion of them. In discoursing further, my design is,

I. To consider what sins are properly sins of infirmity, and what not.

II. To inquire how our state and condition to God-wards is affected by them.

III. To shew what kind of management on our part, may be prudent and proper in regard to them.

First, I am to consider what sins are properly sins of infirmity.

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Their general nature is briefly described thus; that they are rather weak than wilful, having much more of frailty than of wilfulness in them. Something of wilfulness they must have, otherwise they could not be imputed as sins: but as the degree of wilfulness is small in comparison, and the frailty so much the greater; they have therefore their denomination from their most prevailing ingredient, and so are called sins of infirmity. They are such, as by a very accurate caution and circumspection might be avoided or prevented, and therefore they are sins: but yet, because such exact caution or circumspection is but rarely seen, and is not generally to be expected, therefore it is that the sins of that kind have the favour of being numbered among human frailties. They are a kind of slips, failings, or deviations, issuing from an honest and good heart, and carrying no malice prepenſe, no premeditated guile, no ill meaning in them; harmless almost as to the matter of them, and without any bad design. They are owing either to inadvertency, forgetfulness, surprize, strength of passion, or to the suddenness and violence of an unlooked for temptation. But this general description of them will not be so instructive or satisfactory to common hearers, as a particular detail may be, while I descend to special cases and instances, which is what I now intend.

Sins of infirmity, then, may be branched out into three several sorts, respecting either our thoughts, our words, or our actions.

1. I begin with the first of them, such as have respect to the inward thought. And here we are liable to offend two ways, either in not thinking as we ought to think, or in thinking as we ought not.

Human frailty is too often and too sadly felt, in what concerns the government of the thoughts. Who is there that does not often find distraction, and wanderings, and deadness at his prayers, private or public; but public more especially, as we there meet with more objects to divert the eyes, and to turn off the attention? There is nothing which a man has less under command than his own thoughts, in such cases. He may be very devout this minute, and design to be so all the way through, and yet be quite thrown off the next moment, without observing it

presently; and when he does observe it, he knows not how it came to him, but that it is like his waking from a dream. This kind of non-attention, or absence of thought, in religious exercises, so far as it is a sin (for it is not so always), is, generally speaking, a sin of infirmity, and no more. And it is then only to be reckoned among wilful sins, when a man makes a habit of it, and slothfully submits to it, without striving against it; or, when it carries some contempt of the service with it, arising from some vicious principle of the mind.

Besides the sin of infirmity now mentioned, I may name some others reducible to the same head: such as not thinking often enough, or highly enough, of God and his good providence; not having him constantly in our thoughts, nor setting him before our eyes; not attending to his calls, not regarding his judgments, nor being duly thankful for his mercies, and the like. As to omissions of this kind, more or less, we offend all; and such offences, we may hope, will rise no higher in account than pitiable infirmities.

To these we may add, the not thinking how to lay hold of and to improve any opportunities we meet with of doing good in the world; and this, through dulness, through inadvertency, or forgetfulness: for, if we wilfully and designedly let slip the golden opportunity offered us, and despite the invitation, the sin is then wilful, and the offence presumptuous.

Among sins of infirmity belonging to this head, may be reckoned some kinds of unbelief, as both belief and unbelief respect the inward thoughts of the heart. Want of faith or trust in God's words, or his promises, in some timorous minds, may justly pass for a sin of infirmity. Such was the sin of Zacharias, in doubting of the truth of the angel's message to him; and for such unbelief of his, he was struck dumb, and continued so, not able to speak for a season. Our blessed Lord often reproved his disciples for the like want of faith, or trust, saying unto them, *O ye of little faith*, and the like. Several of God's true servants under the Old Testament betrayed sometimes the like diffidence and doubtfulness. Moses, in his excessive shyness and modesty, durst not undertake to speak before Pharaoh, though he had God's commission for doing it: and Jonas the prophet discovered the like tergiversation

tion and backwardness, as to the errand he was sent upon to the Ninevites. These are instances of human frailty, in men otherwise very pious and religious. Thomas's unbelief was somewhat worse, and was carried farther. It was a strange instance of obstinacy to resolve to believe nothing but what he should see and feel. This fault of his can but hardly come under the head of infirmity : except it were because there was something very particular in the temper of the man, which might render it the more excusable in him. But Mary's want of faith in respect to our Lord's raising up her brother Lazarus, before she saw it done, is a proper instance of a sin of infirmity, and falls under this head.

Many timorous persons, though otherwise very religious and devout, are apt to offend in this kind ; not relying upon God's good providence, nor reposing their trust in him with such confidence as they ought. They despond, and sink down in the day of adversity more than becomes them to do ; as if they had forgot, that the very hairs of their heads are all numbered ; or as if they had never read, that not so much as a sparrow falleth to the ground, but by the order, or with the permission, of an all-knowing God.

Hitherto, I have been considering such sins of infirmity as respect the inward thoughts, in such cases wherein we do not think as we ought to think.

There is another branch of the same head, which is, the thinking as we ought not. The former is a sin of omission only, this of commission, both resting in the mind. When we are thinking of this world only, suppose in prayer time, or sermon time, instead of thinking of a better, as most of us are too apt to do : this, we hope, may pass for a sin of infirmity, if not chosen by us, nor designedly indulged.

Sometimes profane blasphemous thoughts will rise up in men's minds : but if they be checked as soon as observed, and are not consented to, they are, at most, no more than sins of infirmity, owing generally to bodily indispositions. The same, I say, even of unchaste or malicious thoughts, if they are only short and transient, which abide not, which do not gain our consent, but are condemned by us as soon as perceived ; they are then either sins of infirmity only, or not sins at

all. For what the will, or choice, has no hand in, is not imputable to us as a fault ; it may be our misfortune. The first risings, the first dartings of a thought into the mind, are very little, if at all, in our power : we are mostly passive in them, and are no farther accountable for them, than as we afterwards make them ours by indulging them, and taking pleasure in them : then, indeed, such evil thoughts become crimes, and grow up from infirmities into wilful sins.

The first emotions of the passions are as little in our power as the other. A sudden fear, or astonishment, the first kindlings of wrath and anger, or the like : these a man cannot help : they come upon him unawares, and take him by surprise. So far he is innocent ; and if they dwell with him a little time, they may amount to sins of infirmity : but if they are farther indulged, as if anger, suppose, is suffered to grow into rage, or to settle into malice, it then becomes wilful, deadly sin.

Too much warmth and eagerness, in some instances, is a sin of infirmity. Such, I suppose, was Peter's eagerness, when he drew his sword, without staying for his Lord's commission, and smote off a servant's ear. Perhaps, also, St. Paul was too warm and eager, when he so sharply rebuked the High Priest, correcting himself, however, presently after, and making an apology for what he had said.

Excessive fondness, in some cases, is another instance of sins of infirmity. Fond parents, especially, have great reason to hope that their partial and often foolish fondness, shall pass for no worse ; otherwise they would many times have a great deal to answer for. David's fondness for his son Absalom was very highly extravagant, and such as is not to be justified upon any principle of religion or reason : nevertheless, it must admit of a fair excuse upon the score of infirmity ; it was no wilful sin. But Eli's indulgence and remissness towards his sons, whom he, as a magistrate, ought to have corrected, being more deliberate, and of much worse tendency, that was charged upon him as a heinous crime, and both he and his posterity remarkably suffered for it.

To this head I may refer credulity, or over-hasty belief, as being often a sin of infirmity, and pertaining only to the mind.

mind. Many an honest and good man may be too credulous in believing idle stories, and false reports; when he ought to be upon his guard. Thus the man of God suffered himself to be deceived by the lying prophet of Bethel, and paid dear for his credulity; though, as I conceive, his sin was no more than a sin of infirmity: he meant well, and had an honest mind.

To the same head may be referred over great carefulness, or anxiety, in respect of worldly things. It is to be hoped, that much of this kind may be allowed to pass among our pitiable failings, and bear no harder a name than that of sins of infirmity. Martha, a very good woman in the main, was yet careful and cumbered about many things, more than she should have been; and she received a gentle rebuke for it from our blessed Lord. It was a sin to be so over-careful and anxious for trifles, to the neglect of better things: but she did not consider it; she intended well, and thought even her sister to blame for not doing as she did, though she was much better employed.

Hitherto I have been considering sins of infirmity as reaching no farther than the mind, resting in thought only. I proceed now to a second article, or head of discourse, respecting our speech.

2. Many are our sins of infirmity reducible to this head. *If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man*, a very faint upon earth, as St. James justly observes. (James, iii. 2.) But where shall we find such a person? or has there ever been such an one, our blessed Lord only excepted, who had no sin, nor was *guile found in his mouth*? Many are the offences of the tongue: our greatest comfort is, that several of them may pass for frailties only; and happy will it be for us, if we go no farther. Moses, one of the best men that ever lived, stands charged in Scripture, as one speaking *unadvisedly with his lips* (Psal. cvi. 33.), in an affair of high consequence. It was a sudden passion that betrayed him into it, and he had no ill-meaning: it was a sin of infirmity. I am persuaded that even Peter's denial of his Lord was rather weak than wilful: he was surprized into it, had forgot himself, and had not yet time to recollect. He had a very honest heart, and had courage enough even to fight or die for his Lord, at another time. And as

soon as ever he perceived how meanly he had behaved in denying his Lord, he was sadly struck with it, and wept bitterly for it. All these circumstances plead in his favour, and make his sin appear rather as a sin of infirmity, than a presumptuous sin.

I should be willing to hope, that hasty, heedless swearing, or taking God's name in vain, in those who had unhappily got a habit of it from their childhood, may be but a sin of infirmity, for some time: but to such as perceive it, and continue it, and use not all proper means and care to get the better of it, and to break the evil habit, to them it is wilful and deadly sin.

Telling of lies I do not reckon among the sins of infirmity; it is, generally, at least, a voluntary chosen thing: but varying a little from strict truth, or adding to it, as is sometimes done, undesignedly, hastily, forgetfully, in the making a report, if it be in things of slight consequence; that may be numbered among human frailties.

Angry and passionate speeches may mostly fall under the head of infirmities: but bitter invectives, and irritating, injurious reflections, made in cold blood, made deliberately, are without excuse.

There are sometimes sharp contentions between very good men, and very good friends, where both sides mean well, but differ in opinion or judgment. Such was the sharp contention between Paul and Barnabas, recorded Acts xv. in which Barnabas appears to have been blameable, in favouring his kinsman Mark more than became him to do, where the public interest of the church lay at stake: but this was his infirmity; and even the best of men will be subject to human frailties.

It would be endless to enumerate all the offences of the tongue, which men are liable to. It is a difficult matter to talk much, and well: great talkers offend often; and they who say the least, are generally the most innocent.

Yet there may be a fault sometimes in being too reserved, shy, and silent: as when a man neglects to exhort or reprove his neighbour, as occasions offer, or when he can patiently sit by, and hear the name of God dishonoured, or an innocent absent man abused, without opening his mouth in defence of either. Such reservedness, in some cases, may rise no higher than a sin of infirmity. But for the most

most part we may more justly call it a wilful neglect; betraying meanness of spirit, at least, or something worse.

But enough hath been said of sins of infirmity, so far as relates to speech.

3. I come now, in the third place, to the most material article of all, which concerns our outward actions: and here also we may offend two ways; either as neglecting to do what we ought, or as doing what we ought not.

Sins of infirmity are mostly seen in our manifold omissions and neglects, either forgetting what duties are incumbent upon us, or performing them but in part. Who can say how oft he offendeth in this kind? Who can say that he hath acquitted himself perfectly in every instance of duty towards God, and towards his neighbour? To his king or to his country; to his family or relations; to his friends and to his enemies; to high and low; to rich and poor; to every man he has any relation to, or concern with? Hard would be our circumstances, were we to give a strict account of all our omissions; or if much the greater part of them were not kindly overlooked by an all-merciful God, as pitiable frailties. Yet let not any man set light by omissions. Wilful omissions of known duties, are wilful and presumptuous sins: and there are some kinds of omissions which will be always charged as wilful, and will be enough to exclude us from the kingdom of heaven: particularly, if we omit or neglect to worship God, or do good to man, as our opportunities and abilities permit. If we neglect to feed the hungry, or to clothe the naked, or to visit the sick, or to comfort the afflicted; our blessed Lord himself hath told us, that we shall not be admitted into the kingdom of heaven: and further, if we neglect or omit to forgive our enemies, we can have no forgiveness at the hands of God. Briefly, then, though many of our omissions, or neglects, amount only to sins of infirmity, yet there are sins of omission which are both wilful and dangerous, as any other sins are, and which will admit of no excuse upon any pretence of human frailty.

I come next to speak of sins of commission, the doing what we ought not to do. Sins of this kind are most wilful: but some there are which may be justly looked upon as sins of infirmity. Drunkenness in righteous Neah, once only,

might be a sin of infirmity. He was not aware of the effects of wine: he had not till then had experience of it: he was overtaken unawares, and surprized into it. I know not whether the like favourable excuse may not be admitted for others who may once unhappily fall into the like excess unawares. But, generally speaking, as the world now stands, a man can scarce be surprized into such excess, or overtaken without his fault. Many, perhaps, will say, that they did not, or do not, design to drink so far as to be drunken: that may be true; but still they are wilful sinners, and drunkards, for not designing and resolving to be constantly sober, and for not using the proper means to avoid temptation.

Some have been weak enough to plead human frailty, even for crying and scandalous sins; such as fornication, or adultery, or other sinful lusts: but all such pretences are vain. Sins of that kind never are, never can be, committed without great degrees of wilfulness. It is not surprize, nor inadvertency, which brings a man into the commission of such offences; but they are chosen and premeditated sins, and a man is drawn into them through lust, and wantonness, by several steps and degrees, with full consent of a depraved will. Slight offences a man may be drawn into by surprize or incontinency; but hardly into the great ones. The mind starts, and conscience generally gives the alarm before-hand, that a man must take some pains with himself, generally, before he can reconcile himself to any great and scandalous vices. Such offences, therefore, are not sins of infirmity, but they are deliberate, presumptuous, damning sins. If it be pleaded, that the object is inviting, and the temptation strong, violent, irresistible; that is just such a plea as any common thief or robber might make for invading property, or making an assault. No doubt but that such persons are violently tempted to commit such outrages, or they would not do them. The temptation, probably, in that case, is stronger than in the other; for a thief or a robber does it at the utmost peril, and ventures his life in it; whereas it is more than probable, that if fornication or adultery were as severely prohibited, and punishable by the laws of the land, it would be found that the men of pleasure could command themselves, and

resist

resist the temptation : but they are encouraged, after they have laid aside the fear of God, by the hopes of impunity from man ; and then being got above restraint, they commit all uncleanness with greediness.

There are some other kinds of sins for which human infirmity is sometimes pleaded, and with very little reason. Acts of hostility, assaults, beating, striking, wounding, and the like. It is said, by way of excuse, that they were provoked to it, and that flesh and blood could not forbear in such cases. But these are pretences only, of vain men, who have not yet learned any thing of Christian meekness, but who have hearts too proud and stubborn to submit to the rules of the gospel. Sins of infirmity, properly so called, are sins of quite another kind than those I have now mentioned. Good men run sometimes into excessive warmth and zeal in the discharge of a duty, or execution of an office : they may be guilty of indiscreet rigours, and push things too far ; may be so afraid of not doing good enough, that they will even over-do, and be too officious, or too severe, exceeding the bounds of Christian prudence, and doing hurt, when they intended good.

These, and other the like indiscretions of good men, are properly sins of infirmity, owing to inadvertency or surprize, or to some natural weakness adhering to their particular temper, complexion, and constitution.

From what hath been said, every intelligent hearer may competently judge which are sins of infirmity, and which not : and I thought it of moment, to be as distinct and particular as possible on this head, to prevent mistakes ; by which means this part has been drawn out into a greater length than I at first supposed ; and I have no room left for the two other articles I proposed to treat of. I shall therefore break off for the present, and, with your good leave, defer the remainder to another opportunity.

SERMON IV.

The Nature and Danger of Presumptuous Sins.

PSALM xix. 13.

Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins : let them not have dominion over me ; then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

THESE are the words of pious David, the undoubted author of this religious song or psalm. In the verse going before, he had put up his petition for pardon of all the failures and errors of his life past, even of such as had escaped his notice, or had slipped out of his memory : *Who can understand his errors ? cleanse thou me from secret faults.* But besides those slighter offences, he was aware also of the offences of a more heinous kind ; and therefore immediately subjoins a prayer against them likewise : *Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins : let them not have dominion over me ; then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.*

The words, as they run in our new translation, are not difficult to understand, and so will need the less opening. Indeed, the words of the original have been thought capable of a very different version, and consequently of as different a sense : but I shall not take notice of niceties of that kind, which would be both dry and useless. The sense which they bear in our translation is a very good one, and is judiciously preferred before any other. I proceed, therefore, to consider the matter contained in it. In discoursing hereupon, I shall take this method,

I. To treat of sins in general, their nature, kinds, and measures.

II. To treat of presumptuous sins in particular, with the malignity and danger of them, and the concern we ought to have to stand clear of them.

III. To close all with proper advice and directions how to avoid them.

I. I propose to treat of sins in general, their nature, kinds, and measures.

Sin is rightly defined, a transgression of God's law : and is either the doing of something which God has forbidden, or the leaving undone what God has commanded. The doing what we ought not to do, is called a sin of commission : and the

the not doing what we ought, is styled a sin of omission. In the one, we commit a trespass; in the other, we neglect a duty; and either way we sin. Sins of either kind may differ in their degrees of greater and less, according to their different matter, circumstances, and aggravations.

The stoic philosophers, and some few of the less considerate Christians, have pretended, that all sins are equal. Their reasons for it are not worth the mentioning; for the conceit is so groundless, and so repugnant to the common sense of mankind, that barely to speak of it, is to expose it, and it carries its own confutation with it. For, a man must be very weak to imagine, that theft, suppose, is as great a sin as murder; or fornication as high a crime as adultery; or telling a lie as wicked a thing as robbing a house, or plundering a church, or firing a town. Every body is sensible of a difference between high crimes and trivial trespasses; between sins of the first magnitude, and slight offences: our Lord, therefore, compares some to gnats, while he compares others to camels; some to motes in the eye, others to beams.

Seeing, therefore, that sins are not equal, but differing in degree, as the text also intimates; the next inquiry is, what makes the difference, or by what rules or measures we may judge of it.

There are two considerations to be taken in, which seem to be the principal in determining of the greatness of any sin. One is the matter of the sin itself, or the mischievous tendency of it: the other is, the degree of malice or wilfulness in the person committing it.

Moral evil, the same with sin, is the choosing something which is naturally evil, or is of mischievous tendency. The case is plain in all instances prohibited by the law of nature: and as to cases prohibited by the positive law of God, the prohibition brings them under the same rule: for then a man cannot break through the prohibition, without affronting, contemning, disobeying Almighty God: and that is naturally evil, and of evil tendency; it is rebellion against the Creator, which is of pernicious example, and carries many mischievous consequences in it, with respect to man's temporal and eternal welfare. I say, then, first judge we of the heinousness of a sin by the mischievous

tendency of it. Thus, to instance in matters of a moral nature, stealing is not so hurtful as maiming; nor is maiming so mischievous as murder; nor is murder of an equal, so mischievous as the murder of a superior, a magistrate, a father, or the prince we are subject to.

In matters of a positive nature, neglecting to defend or to maintain the gospel, when commanded, is a grievous sin; because the salvation of thousands may be concerned in it; but the opposing the gospel is much worse, and is of yet greater malignity. Neglecting the sacraments, or other solemn ordinances of God, is a great sin, as it is slighting God's goodness, affronting his authority, and setting a very ill example: but rejecting them utterly, or contemning them, is high profaneness, and of most pernicious tendency, as it is striking at all instituted religion directly, and at morality in consequence; and so, in the last result, at the general happiness of mankind, here and hereafter. This may serve to explain what I mean by the evil tendency of any sin.

The other consideration is, the degree of wilfulness in the person committing it. Whatever mischief a man may do, he is no farther chargeable with it, than as he made it his choice; no farther than he knew what he was doing, and wilfully chose it. A mad man may do a great deal of mischief, but in him it is no sin. The like may be said of a natural fool, or idiot. Where there is no reason, nor choice, there can be no sin. And supposing a man, under the use of reason, to do mischief, either being compelled to it, or not knowing that it is mischief, or not considering it, or not designing it; these will be all so many articles in his favour, either to acquit him entirely of blame, or to excuse and extenuate, in proportion to the degree of the necessity he was under. Hence it is, that divines have distinguished sins into three kinds; called sins of ignorance, sins of infirmity, and sins of presumption. The will is supposed to concur more or less in all, otherwise they could not be sins; but they have their names from what is most prevailing and predominant in each. If there be more of ignorance than wilfulness in it, it is a sin of ignorance; if there be more of infirmity than wilfulness in it, it is a sin of infirmity: but if there be more of wil-

fulness than of either, or both the former, it is then a wilful sin; and that is what my text calls presumptuous sin. To say something more particular of each:

1. Of a sin of ignorance: Such was the sin of Abimelech, when he took unto him Abraham's wife, not knowing her to be his wife, but supposing her to be his sister only. What he did was with an upright heart, so far; ignorantly consenting to adultery: but yet, because he might have made farther inquiry, and might have informed himself better, if he had had patience, and had not been too precipitate; he was, therefore, not wholly innocent: a sin he was guilty of, but a sin of ignorance; and therefore he found mercy at the hands of God.

A second example, but more approaching to a sin of presumption, was St. Paul's persecuting the church of Christ. He did it ignorantly, and in unbelief, out of an honest and well-meant zeal: but he sinned in so doing, and grievously too; because he had had several opportunities of knowing better; and he had seen enough of the miraculous powers of the church, to convince a man of his education and abilities, if he had duly attended to them. However, because his ignorance in that case was not entirely affected, nor owing to envy, malice, or other corrupt principle; his sin, in that instance, may pass among the sins of ignorance, rather than among the sins of presumption: it was blameable, but pitiable at the same time; for ignorance lessens and extenuates a fault, more or less, according as the ignorance was more or less wilful. If the ignorance had been perfectly involuntary and unavoidable, it would have entirely acquitted him of all blame. *If you were blind,* says our Lord to the Pharisees, *you should have no sin.* (John, ix. 41.) But when the ignorance is in some measure voluntary, and in some measure involuntary, there it does not take off the guilt entirely, but lessens and extenuates it in proportion: *He that knew not his Lord's will, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes* (Luke, xii. 48.) Such is the nature and description of a sin of ignorance.

2. Next to which is the sin of infirmity, owing to the frailty of the flesh, or impetuosity of the affections, as the former is to the blindness of the understanding. Our blessed Lord well describes the

nature of it, where he says, *the spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak.* Sins of infirmity are mostly seen in sins of omission; in our neglect of duties or our defects in performing them; owing to forgetfulness, inadvertency, heaviness, listlessness, and the like. But there are other cases where sins of infirmity steal in, by surprize, by sudden passion, by the vehemence of a temptation, which overpowers the mind before the person has time to consider or recollect. I suppose, Peter's denial of his Lord may be an instance of such a sin. His heart was very sincere and honest; he was suddenly set upon by an unlooked for temptation; he fell unexpectedly, and that but once, against his usual courage, and his repeated resolutions; and he no sooner recollected himself, but he repented in a flood of tears. All these circumstances shew, that there was a great deal more of infirmity than of wilfulness in it; and we may add, that there seems to have been a more than ordinary desertion brought upon him, in that instance, to check the over great confidence he had reposed in himself, and to teach him humility and caution for the future.

Much might be usefully said about sins of infirmity, to distinguish them from sins of presumption, and to prevent people's deceiving themselves with the plea of infirmity, where they have really no right or title to it. But the subject is copious and would lead me too far. It may be sufficient, just to have hinted what the name imports; and I pass on to the third kind of sins, sins of a scarlet dye.

3. Sins of presumption; such as have more of wilfulness and malice prepossessed than of ignorance or infirmity in them when a man sins with a high hand, against the dictates of reason, and the checks of conscience; not merely through ignorance, or human frailty, but wilfully through the stubbornness and perverseness of a depraved, distorted will. It will be easy to distinguish this malignant kind from either of the former. All premeditated offences, though the matter of them should appear slight, considered under the name and notion of presumptuous sins: for wilful disobedience to plain command, though in a small matter, is no small thing. This we see in the case of our first parents; the tasting the forbidden fruit was seemingly a slight matter

matter; but yet, because the command was express, and the disobedience wilful and presumptuous, God repented the contempt, and punished it with a very remarkable and memorable severity.

Among presumptuous sins, we must reckon all those which are of a high and scandalous nature; such as murder, adultery, perjury, sacrilege, fornication, robbery, extortion, oppression, blasphemy, and the like; because those sins are in their own nature vile and mischievous, and known to be so; that a man cannot be supposed to fall into them through mere ignorance, or infirmity, but through the wilfulness and stubbornness of a depraved will.

As to neglects or omissions of duty, many of these also are reducible to the class of presumptuous sins; such as customary neglect of known and plain duties; absenting from public worship, on the Sunday especially, without necessity; living in constant contempt or neglect of the holy communion; refusing the common offices of humanity and Christian charity, when we see proper occasions for the exercise of them; neglecting to feed the hungry, or to clothe the naked, or to commiserate and assist the afflicted, in proportion to our abilities and circumstances. Those acts of mercy are so much the badges of our Christian profession, and are so strongly insisted upon as matters of indispensable duty, quite through both testaments; that we can neither plead ignorance nor infirmity for our non-performance. Omissions of this kind are wilful, presumptuous, damning: so our blessed Lord himself intimates, where he tells us, that the articles of inquiry at the day of judgment will run chiefly on those heads; and men shall be either acquitted or condemned accordingly. So much in the general about the nature, quality, and kinds of presumptuous sins. I proceed,

II. To be more particular in setting forth the malignity and danger of them, and the concern we ought to have to stand clear of them.

You may observe of holy David in the Psalm before us, how he prays, that God would pardon his smaller sins, and cleanse him, by remitting, or not imputing them. As to those greater presumptuous sins, he begs to be wholly kept back from them, to be undefiled with them. He speaks of

them also as amounting to great transgression, and which alone could debar him of the satisfaction of having an upright heart, and a good conscience. His errors and infirmities, he believed, a merciful God would pass by and overlook, upon his general confession and repentance: but the presumptuous sins he was greatly afraid of, being such as might make a most fatal breach between God and him, hard to be made up again and reconciled. Nor were his fears, in this case, at all unreasonable or groundless, if we consider the malignant qualities and mischievous effects of presumptuous sinning.

1. For, first, presumptuous sins spring from the corruption of the heart, from some evil lust or affection, some predominancy of pride, avarice, or voluptuousness. Men will not run upon sins of that kind, to provoke Almighty God wilfully, and daringly, till the world has taken hold of them, and estranged their hearts (in a great measure) from him. It is hanging out the flag of defiance, and entering into a kind of open war or rebellion against Heaven. While a man has ignorance or surprize to plead in excuse for himself, his heart may be still right with God: but when he wilfully and presumptuously offends, it is very plain that his heart is then alienated, and that he has struck up an alliance with the world in opposition to God.

2. We may consider, farther, that, after sinning in this manner, and to this degree, it is very hard to repent. We see this in common friendships one with another. While a man knows that he intended no ill to a friend, but has unwarily done him a prejudice, loving and respecting him all the time; he easily returns, and with an open countenance makes his apology, and asks pardon: but if he has acted against his friend with malice pre-pense, and has designedly affronted or injured him; he grows sullen, and shy, and perhaps shuns the acquaintance ever after. There is something of the like affection left upon the mind of a presumptuous sinner with respect to God. He from that instant contracts a strange aversion to him; he is afraid to approach him, conscious to himself, that he has been acting treacherously; nay, and perhaps strongly inclined, if not resolved, even to do so again; at least not fully resolved against it; he has therefore little or no

heart to pray to God, or to ask pardon, except it be in a slight superficial manner, as words of course. By degrees, the breach grows wider between God and him; and he stands off more and more, till at length he renounces, in a manner, all further acquaintance with his Maker. This is often the result of giving way, at first, to presumptuous sins. But,

3. Supposing, thirdly, that a man relents soon after, and is disposed to repent heartily and turn to God; yet it will be difficult for him so to heal the breach which those sins have made, as to come with delight, and humble confidence, to his God, as before. The remembrance of his sins of unfaithfulness will, for some time, bring a cloud over his mind; and he will, of course, be full of fear, doubtfulness, and anxiety; hardly knowing how to trust himself for the future, hardly daring to look up with cheerfulness to God.

I do not know a more affecting, or more melancholy, example of what I am now mentioning, than David himself. From the time he fell into presumptuous sins, in the matter of Uriah (though he was penitent for it, and a pardon was granted him by the hand of a prophet), yet how sorrowful and troubled was his afflicted mind all his life after; he never recovered his wonted courage and vivacity; he hung down his head, and went mourning all the day long; his spirit was bowed down with grief, and he was scarce able to bear up under the afflicting hand of God. He seems not to have been the same man as formerly, nor to have kept up either the figure or the character in life which he had before done. What with the afflictions God sent him in his family and his kingdom, and what with his remorse for his transgressions, he appears to have been, as it were, unmanned, and sunk in his spirits for the rest of his life, and to have behaved and acted below his character. Repentance is the best thing we can retreat to, and is indeed the only plank left whereon to escape, in such a case; but, in the mean while, how much better is innocence, than the most holy and solemn repentance?

It may, indeed, be said, that David's sin, in that instance, was very great for the matter of it, as well as its being presumptuous. Very true: but every presumptuous sin, in proportion, brings its train of mis-

chiefs with it. We see it in its best light, when we take a view of it in a person who was sincerely penitent. The most melancholy consideration of all is, that presumptuous sins generally harden the conscience, and carry the man off from bad to worse, till they sink him down to a state of stupidity here, and to perdition hereafter. From all which it is manifest, how highly it concerns every man to be extremely cautious how he ventures upon sins of this kind, and to use all possible endeavours to stand clear of wilful and deliberate, that is, presumptuous sins. It remains now, thirdly,

III. To offer some proper advice and directions how to avoid them.

1. The first care most certainly is, to be instant in prayers to Almighty God, to preserve us, by his preventing grace, from falling into them. There is no firm security but in God's mercy, so disposing the affairs of life, and all outward occurrences, as not to expose us to temptations beyond our strength. There lies our principal security, to throw ourselves into his arms, and to commit ourselves entirely to his protection. This, as I said, is to be done by our constant and fervent prayers. God expects to be asked and intreated by us, and has made it the condition, and instrumental means, of conveying his grace and blessing to us. But besides this, prayer has naturally a good effect upon the mind of the supplicant: it preserves a constant awe and reverence for God; and is keeping up a kind of acquaintance and intercourse with Heaven. It carries in it a repugnancy and opposition to all wilful sins, and has the force of a standing declaration or remonstrance against them. With what heart, with what face, can a man carry on a daily correspondence and converse with God in prayer, and at the same time be in confederacy with Satan, presumptuously rebelling against the God he prays to? One would conclude, that, either continuing to pray would make a man afraid and ashamed to sin in that high manner; or else, that his so sinning must make him leave off his prayers: for those two things seem to stand at the greatest distance possible, and are scarce consistent with each other. But, secondly,

2. After prayers to God to assist us, we must next use our best endeavours to help ourselves; exerting to the utmost those

those powers and faculties which God hath given us, for his glory, and for our own happiness. We should consider seriously of all the most proper and likely means to be made use of, in order to prevent our falling into presumptuous sins.

The first and principal is, to look well to our hearts, that they be set right, and kept with all diligence. We may observe, that sinning presumptuously is, as it were, revolting from God, and running off into another interest. Our hearts are not whole with God when we do it. We have let our affections go astray from him, placing them somewhere else; upon the alluring objects of worldly riches, honour, or pleasure. This is undoubtedly the case, as often as men run into presumptuous sins. Wherefore the true and most effectual way to prevent our doing so, is to look well to our hearts, and to keep them fixed where they ought to be, upon God alone. *Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth.* This is striking at the root of all presumptuous sins, is stifling them in their birth. We shall not wilfully sin against God, till we have learned to love the world more than we love him; till we have suffered Satan and his emissaries to steal our affections from God, and to transfer them to other objects. Take we care, then, in the first place, to govern our affections, and to point them to their true object.

And, in order to do this the more effectually, our next care should be, to be often reflecting upon the infinite value of heavenly things, above all earthly enjoyments: how far eternity is preferable to time, and God to the world: how slight, empty, and transient all secular things are; not worthy to be compared with the joys that shall be hereafter. These, and other the like considerations, often repeated and treasured up in our minds, will be of use to fix our affections on things above, and so to prevent our falling into presumptuous sins.

Our further care should be to keep out of temptations as much as possible; that so we may carry the same good thoughts the more constantly about us, and not let them slip. The misfortune of man is, that, though he has resolved ever so well, and has armed himself with many excellent meditations, yet new occasions, and unexpected occurrences, may suggest new thoughts, and give quite another turn to

the mind. The safest way, therefore, is to avoid, as much as we can, all such occasions; and, as we pray not to be led into temptation, so let us take care, not to run into it of our own accord.

The last thing I shall mention, is, to be watchful and cautious in our whole conduct, and especially to beware of the beginnings of things. It is the policy of Satan to draw men on by degrees, to intice them first into something of doubtful appearance, something that borders upon sin, and yet strictly is not sin, or has an innocent look however; and so to proceed step by step to what at length is undoubtedly sinful and dangerous. The way to avoid this snare, is to be wary and circumspect; not to venture to the utmost limits of what is lawful; but to keep at a due distance, and to observe our compass; to deny ourselves some innocent liberties for fear of their betraying us farther; and not to trust ourselves where we suspect the combat may be unequal, or our strength fail us.

By these, and other the like prudent precautions, God's grace preventing and assisting us, we may preserve ourselves from presumptuous sins, may be undefiled and innocent from the great transgression.

S E R M O N V.

The Misery, Causes, and Remedies of a dejected Mind.

PROV. xviii. 14.

The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?

THIS passage of Scripture may be rendered otherwise with a slight variation in the latter part of the sentence, thus: *The spirit of a man (of a brave man) will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded (dejected) spirit, who shall raise it up?*

The words, as I conceive, carry in them an important lesson of instruction, though it is rather obliquely insinuated, than directly expressed. Here is a caution given, or intimated rather, against yielding too far to any misfortunes or troubles; against letting our spirits sink, or our courage fail us in our day of calamity. It is of infinite advantage, under all emergencies, to keep up strength of mind

mind, and to bear up against disasters or difficulties, with a firm and undaunted heart. For, a vigorous mind, a manly spirit, will support us under bodily infirmities within, or cross accidents without: but if the spirit itself be broken and cast down, if the mind becomes feeble, and sinks under the weight, what can then be thought on to raise it up? When the buttresses themselves give way, and the main under-props fail, what can then be expected but sudden and irrevocable ruin? The turn and the manner of the expression in the text is very like to what our Lord makes use of in a different subject; where he says, *If the salt hath lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?* (Matth. v. 13. Mark, ix. 50. Luke, xiv. 34.) If that which should season other things, does itself want seasoning, what can then be done to it? And so in the instance of the text, if that which should support the weaker parts, does itself want supporting, what remedy can then be hoped for? The case is then melancholy indeed, and beyond all recovery. Great care, therefore, should be taken in time, to prevent, if possible, so sad a crisis, and that no calamities whatever be permitted to reduce us to this so disconsolate extremity. Such I take to be the general drift and purport of the text now before us. The subject, therefore, of my discourse, must be a troubled and dejected mind.

I. The misery of it.

II. The causes which lead to it.

III. The proper remedies or preservatives against it.

The subject is undoubtedly very useful, and may well deserve our attentive thoughts, and serious application.

I. I shall begin with some brief strictures upon the miserable case of a dejected broken mind. *A wounded spirit, who can bear?* as our translation renders it; or, who can raise it up? as the other. Both renderings are grammatical, and we may very well take in both senses, as they are both of them true and pertinent: for the misery of a broken spirit is, that it is intolerable to bear, and is without support or remedy.

The words of the text have been vulgarly understood of a wounded conscience, tending to despair; but I see no reason for confining the text to that case only. The words are spoken of a wounded spi-

rit in the general, wounded by grief, and sinking under its load of troubles; but not expressing either the particular kind of troubles, or the special causes they spring from. I shall enumerate the several causes which may be supposed in such cases, under my next head of discourse. But at present, all I have to take notice of is, the sad and disconsolate condition of a dejected broken mind, be the cause of it what it will.

But, in order to have a right understanding of this case, let us consider, in the first place, what a dejected mind, or a wounded spirit, means.

We may observe, that all manner of trouble and misery, as felt by the patient, is resolvable into pain of body, or pain of mind; into some uneasy sensations, which we commonly call pain, or uneasy thoughts and reflections, which we commonly call anguish. Strictly speaking, all pains that we feel are in the mind, or in the soul. The body is but the organ or instrument which transmits the pain to the soul. The soul only feels, in and through the body: so that every uneasy sensation of the body, as we call it, is properly the soul's. And besides uneasy sensations, the mind, over and above, hath many uneasy reflections, which increase the pain, and more than double the misery.

These things being premised, we may the more clearly perceive of what advantage it is in all kinds of uneasinesses, to have a mind well fortified and steeld against them. The mind, by fencing against the mischief, keeps it out, in a great measure, and does not let in one half of the anguish: while the spirit bears up against it with manly courage, it wards off the blow, or breaks the force of the impression. And if you would know more particularly how it does it, you may please to consider, that no pain whatever is so much as felt, any longer than while it is attended to, or reflected upon. But there is that force in the mind, when firm and well resolved, that it can turn the thoughts off from dwelling upon the present or threatening pain, and can employ itself with brave and comfortable reflections. This is what the text means in saying, that *the spirit of a man will sustain its infirmity*. It will bear up against danger or trouble, will be so flushed with a sense of honour, and other generous views, and

with high and noble expectations, that the sense of pain shall scarce be felt at all, or shall be slight in comparison. Those other joyous reflections will counter-balance it, or will so fill the mind, as scarce to leave room for the reception of any thing else. This is what we call strength of mind, and sometimes fortitude; and it is of admirable use to repel uneasiness and pain, and to prevent its making any deep or durable impressions. Something indeed will be felt by us after we have done all we can: for there is no being perfectly insensible to smart, or unconcerned at misfortunes. But the smart being less attended to, in such a case, receives no increase by any galling reflections; yea, it is much abated and deadened by joyous thoughts and high expectations. Thus the spirit of a man, while firm and erect, sustains its infirmity, and becomes a kind of armour of proof against either inward pains or outward disasters.

But if once the spirit itself begins to yield and give way; if the mind, by continual troubles, or long struggling, at length faints and sinks under them; then comes the case which the text speaks of, the case of a wounded spirit, a dejected broken mind. The misery of it is manifest, in some measure, from what hath been already said. It is like giving up the fort, or citadel, upon which the enemy enters, and makes terrible havoc and devastation. While the mind retained its force and strength, the adversary was kept at some distance, and not suffered to do much harm; but as soon as ever the mind loses its courage, and lays down its arms, the adversary rushes in, and makes fearful ravages. To speak out of metaphor; when the spirit thus sinks, and bears up no longer, then every calamity puts on the blacker face, and every pain and uneasiness stings to the quick, and is much increased by galling reflections. The mind is haunted with dark images, with melancholy scenes of horror and distress. The man sits down and indulges his sorrow, hugs his grief, abandons himself to impatience, bitter wailing, and despair, refusing to be comforted, or so much as to hear of the name. This may serve for an imperfect description of a wounded spirit, and of the misery attending it. But as the mind may be more or less wounded,

with almost infinite variety of degree; so the calamity of the case is more or less grievous, and of consequence more or less removed from possibility of recovery.

Having described the case as briefly as I well could, I now proceed, as I proposed, to my second general head:

II. To point out the principal causes which lead to this melancholy extremity. The occasional and immediate causes of this malady are either from without, or from within; either from outward afflictions, or inward disorder of body, or trouble of conscience. I shall consider them severally and distinctly.

1. The outward calamities of life are many and various. The most afflicting, generally, are not those which bring the greatest smart, or the acutest pain with them; but those rather, which bear hardest upon the soft and tender passions.

One shall scarce know a man overtaken with melancholy on account of what he suffers by the gout, or stone, or by an ulcer, or the cutting off limbs, or other bodily pains: and yet for the loss of sons and daughters, or other dear friends and relations, one may find several overwhelmed with grief unconsolable. The reason, I suppose, is, the exceeding great delicacy and tenderness of those soft passions, by which we are carried to love those whom we have chiefly set our hearts upon: crosses and disappointments in things of that tender nature, are very affecting, and often overset the mind.

Loss of honour, estate, subsistence, is likewise very afflicting to some persons; to those especially who have long supported their credit, and have made a handsome figure in the world, having, at the same time, fair and promising hopes that they should ever do so. When such persons unexpectedly fall to decay, the calamity sits hard upon them; and the more honest and ingenuous they have all along been, so much the sorer is the affliction; because they have a quick sense of shame, and are most tenderly affected with the thought, that they can no longer look up, and appear like their neighbours.

As to men of profligate lives, I do not perceive, that they are half so much affected, though they come to be stripped of all. They are more hardened in their tempers, and are not very sensible

of shame ; besides that they might have expected it beforehand, having really deserved it ; and so it is no wonder if sometimes a condemned felon is not much afflicted with his confinement in a dungeon ; or if he goes with less concern in his looks even to execution, than many an honest man discovers upon some family-losses, or upon the decay of his credit in the world.

These smaller calamities to an ingenuous mind are more affecting, than the greatest can be to hard, stupid, and incorrigible wretches ; and the reason, as I before hinted, is, because the passions of those are more tender, and the mind more susceptible of impression. Hence arises sometimes deep melancholy in such persons. Their minds become dejected and sunk, their spirit wounded and broken with losses, crosses, and disappointments. The like sometimes happens when men have set out into the world with fair hopes and expectations, have been flattered with golden promises, and been long dependant upon persons in power, and at last defeated and sent away empty. The regret and indignation which such treatment is apt to raise, may be enough to overpower the succours of the mind, and to break their spirit beyond recovery. These instances may suffice for illustration of the first particular, the head of outward calamities.

2. A second cause of breaking a man's spirits, I must not omit to mention (though I question whether it be very common), which is, the sense of some grievous sins lying hard upon the conscience. It is very certain that the greatest calamity that can be, is an ill-spent life ; and the remembrance of it, if seriously laid to heart, may well break the spirit, and overwhelm the strongest mind. But it rarely happens that any man falls into deep melancholy on any such account. Much the greater number of the most profligate sinners die hard and impenitent, and go out of the world without any signs of true godly sorrow, or remorse at all. And if some discover a kind of relenting sorrow, yet it is so slight and superficial, and they think so well of their state, and so flatter themselves with the hopes of mercy, that there is infinitely more danger of their dying in a fond presumption, than of their dying in the depth of despair. The

truth is, men are very hardly brought to have any feeling sense of a world to come, like to what they have of this ; and so they are the less in danger of being affected with their sins, or the consequence of them, to a degree of melancholy or despondency. Yet some examples there have been of religious despair ; and I suppose Judas was one ; who being struck with the sense of his cursed treachery, sunk under its weight ; and being wounded and sore broken in his spirit, went and hanged himself in grief and despair. There have been some few dreadful instances of like nature besides, enough to justify the reckoning a guilty conscience as one among the many other causes of a wounded spirit.

I am sensible, that there is such a thing as religious melancholy, and the case is not very uncommon. But I take that to be quite another thing from what I have been speaking of, and falling properly under quite a different head, which I now proceed to speak to, in the third place ; namely,

3. Bodily indisposition, which is frequently the sole cause of a broken, dejected mind. By this I do not mean, that men fall into melancholy, as being troubled for the ill state of health they are under : but as the soul and the body sympathize, any disorder of the nerves, blood, or spirits, will naturally affect and discompose the mind ; and it is in this sense that a wounded spirit may be sometimes owing to an ill habit of body, in like manner as lunacy also may, of which this may be a degree.

Religious melancholy, generally speaking, seems to be nothing else but a disordered imagination, owing to some ill disposition of the blood, or some distemper in the nerves, or in the brain, the center of them. The fine spirits, which are the instruments the soul makes use of to think by, move irregularly, and raise odd fantastical ideas, like as they do in dreams : hence come very odd conceits, and perhaps profane and even blasphemous thoughts, in persons otherwise very piously disposed ; and who at the same time abhor those thoughts, and are deeply concerned on that very account. Here seems to be nothing in all this, but a bodily indisposition, which is indeed a misfortune, but no fault of the person suffering under it.

There

There may indeed have been a fault sometimes in a person's conduct, to occasion such an ill disposition of body; as, if it hath been brought on by hard drinking, or indulging some foolish passion more than was meet: but yet the effect might arise from other causes, wherein the person had not been accessory to it at all. It might be the remains of a fever, or other bodily distemper, which the patient had been afflicted with; or it might have been owing to several other natural causes, too tedious for me to mention, and which it more concerns a physician to inquire into, than it does a divine. I mention this case, however, for two reasons: One, for the satisfaction of scrupulous consciences; that if any persons find themselves so affected, they should not be cast down on that account, nor suspect that they are guilty of a crime in what they cannot help; and the other reason of my taking notice of the case is, that we may pass the more charitable judgment upon any unhappy persons who have been afflicted in this way. But to proceed.

Besides religious melancholy, there are also several other kinds, which often arise from some bodily indisposition, which may be presumed to have the greatest hand in them, in such particular constitutions. For when misfortunes or disappointments, though slight and trivial (and none are without some) fall in with a temper or disposition inclined to melancholy, they have a much greater force upon them than they would otherwise have; and the effect produced is really owing partly to the outward calamity, and partly to the inward disorder; it is the result of both together, both contributing, as it were, their share towards it. In such cases it is not always easy to say which is the principal cause, or which the subordinate: for in compounded powers of that kind, it may be difficult to compute their respective forces, or to determine exactly which is the more prevailing. But I have said enough of the causes which lead to dejection of mind, which break or wound the spirit of a man within him.

III. I now pass on, thirdly, to prescribe some proper remedies or preservatives against it.

It is worth the pains, to keep up our spirits, and to maintain the vigour of our minds, in all cases, if we can. For it is a

lamentable thing to be overset with trouble, or to be overwhelmed with grief and despair. It makes life miserable as life can be for the time, and then brings men down to the grave. When the mind is sunk, the spirit wounded, or, as we vulgarly say, the heart broken, life does not hold on much longer; or if does, it is a burthen, and a weary load, worse than death. There is no remedy for it, when the malady seizes us in any deep degree: for when the mind itself is seized, a man has no longer any command over his own thoughts; there is no room left for advice or instruction; no handle for reason and counsel to take hold of. This makes me speak rather of preservatives than remedies; supposing the text to mean by a wounded spirit, a spirit quite broken: but if it may be understood of the approaches only, or the intermediate degrees, short of extremities; there may then be some remedies, the same which I also call preservatives, and am now going to lay down. It must be owned, that natural courage, inborn strength of mind, is one of the best preservatives, or strongest securities against it: but as that is a blessing of nature, and I am only to speak of what may be acquired, I shall pass that over as foreign to this head. My business will be to lay down rules either for preserving that natural courage where it is, or for acquiring an artificial courage (if I may so call it) which may answer, or more than answer, the other.

1. And here undoubtedly the first and principal rule must be, to trust in God, and to live a life conformable to the doctrine of Christ. There is no prescription so infallible, no cordial so comfortable, as this now mentioned. *Come unto me, says our blessed Lord, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* (Matt. xi. 28.) There is nothing so fortifies the mind, or so invigorates the spirit, as faith and trust in God, joined with a good life; that we may be able to say with St. Paul, *herein do we exercise ourselves, to have always a conscience void of offence, towards God, and towards man.* This consideration taken together with the comfortable hope and expectation of joys eternal in a life to come; I say these two, taken together, are sufficient to warm the coldest heart, and to give courage and bravery to every drooping spirit. The strength of

of these principles has been tried and proved; and it appeared most to advantage in the early ages of the church, when persons of the most tender age, or timorous sex, would run to a stake, or to a rack, without discovering the least uneasiness in look or gesture; and never fainted in heart, nor became broken in spirit, for any trouble or terror that wit and malice combined could expose them to. Now, if a principle of religion was thus effectual in the very hardest circumstances which human life could fall under, why might not the same principle be of like force in the ordinary and common casualties incident to mortality? If therefore you are desirous to keep up your spirit; and never to sink under a misfortune; fortify your minds by faith, and by a serious and constant endeavour to please God. This will inspire courage when nothing else will, or when the world itself fails: it will do it at all times, and under all circumstances, even upon the bed of sickness, or at the hour of death; provided only, that you have then your thoughts awake, and that the bodily indisposition does not disorder the freedom of the soul.

2. Next to a thorough sense of religion, I shall mention a second preservative, nearly allied to it, and rather a branch or part of it, than distinct from it; which is, to sit as loose as possible to this world; to wean and disentangle our affections from temporal things: for, since it is impossible not to meet with infinite crosses and disappointments here, if we set our hearts on this world; the surest way is, not to expect or desire any great happiness here, but to become more and more indifferent to all worldly enjoyments. If we can be content with a moderate share of temporal prosperity, we shall be the less concerned at disappointments, and, of consequence, the better prepared to meet afflictions, and to bear up under them. These two first rules which I have mentioned, both meet together in one rule of St. Paul's, *Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.* (Col. iii. 2.) As to other inferior rules for preserving cheerfulness and vivacity of spirit, such as agreeable company, good books, employment in an honest calling, innocent diversions, and the like; as they are none of them comparable to what I have before

named, it may be sufficient barely to have hinted them. I have not mentioned the drinking away cares, as some call it, among the proper expedients; because indeed it is highly improper, and tends to enfeeble both the body and the mind, by vitiating the blood, wasting the spirits, and disordering the nerves: not to mention, that it is expensive and vain, and is an offence against God; and so, in all views, is more likely to wound and break the spirit, than to fortify or strengthen it. Seek not, therefore, to any of those vain and deceitful expedients, which will by no means answer: but rely upon the true and solid ones before intimated; such as faith, a good life, and a good conscience consequent thereupon, together with fixed and constant meditations upon the joys of a life to come. If ye do these things, ye can never fail.

S E R M O N VI.

Charity and kind Offices, the best
Conquest over an Enemy.

ROM. xii. 21.

Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good.

THE advice is short, comprized in a few words: but it is withal full and instructive, and carries a great deal of good matter in it. It relates to our behaviour towards our enemies; shewing both what we ought not to do, in that case, and what we ought. The Apostle's manner of wording the thing is observable; for there is a particular force and beauty in the very expression. Being sensible, that the forgiving an injury, or the not revenging it, is commonly looked upon as a kind of yielding, and submitting to an adversary (which is what the pride of human nature is most averse to) he prudently anticipates the thought, and gives it quite another turn; handsomely insinuating, that all desire of revenge is yielding and submitting to an enemy; is as much as confessing, that he has disturbed, pained, and disconcerted us to that degree, that we are no longer able to command our temper, and to be really masters of ourselves. Overflowing with rage and resentment, upon such occasions, is betraying a littleness of mind, and pro-

proclaiming our own defeat. It is as good as declaring, that the enemy has got within us, has thrown us off our guard, and put us into disorder and confusion. Whereas, if a man can stand the shock unmoved, and be above being concerned at it, he undoubtedly shews a more manly spirit, and true greatness of mind. He is then seen to be master over his passions, and above being disturbed by little things: and there is none so generous a way of conquering an enemy, as the letting him see, that the worst he can do, shall not so much as ruffle him, or put him out of humour. *Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good.*

The text then consists of two parts, or precepts; the one negative, and the other positive: of which I shall treat in their order.

I. The negative part, or precept, comes first: *Be not overcome of evil.* Suffer not any affront, or injury, to get the better of you, to afflict, and conquer you. More distinctly; suffer it not to get the better of your reason, your piety, or your charity: for if it does so, you are really vanquished and worsted by it.

1. I say, let not any affront, or injury, have the superiority over your reason, considering yourself now only as a man, without taking in the additional consideration of your being a Christian also.

Reason is designed for the governing part of man, which is to regulate and command the passions. While reason holds the reins, and keeps its seat of government, all is right and regular, and a man is master of himself: but if the passions get the upper hand, and domineer over reason, the person, for the time, is, as it were, quite unmanned, and is driven on to any the most extravagant freaks and follies, below the dignity of his nature. A man can never expose himself more to the attacks of his enemy, than when he suffers himself to be heated into a passion, and thereby thrown off his guard. While he can command his temper, and preserve his reason, he will know and consider what he does, and conduct with prudence and discretion; and will at length very probably both defend himself, and become superior to his adversary: but if once he lets go his reason, and resigns himself up to heat and passion, he both exposes his own safety, and surrenders his person to the mercy

of his adversary. A passionate furious warrior neither sees an advantage, nor knows how to use it: while he is all fire, and no conduct, he does but expose his forces, and at length becomes himself an easy prey to the enemy. But a man of cool and steady courage, who does nothing precipitately, nothing rashly, he is the man that maintains his ground, and comes off victorious in the end. Let reason preside always in any private contests between man and man: and by the help of reason, all will proceed regularly, and with honour and advantage. Reason will consider always, not what the offender, or injurious person, might deserve, but what may be prudent and proper for the offended party to do. Perhaps the injury is slight, not deserving notice, or deserving only contempt. Whatever it be, there is more dignity and greatness of mind shewn in being above feeling it, than in fretting at it. Revenging it, is still worse, because it betrays still greater impatience; besides that it is imprudent, as provoking the adversaries, and bringing on fresh injuries; which again will call for rejoinders, and so on in an endless circulation. This is, generally speaking, the case as to revenge: so that, if we consider it merely upon a rational foot, apart from religion, there appears to be very little sense or discretion in it. And as to greatness of mind, every one must be sensible, that it is brave and generous to put up with wrongs, and overlook offences; and that they, generally, are persons of the weakest and feeblest minds, who are most sensible of injuries, and most impatient for revenge.

Seeing then that wrath and revenge is really nothing else but the triumph of passion over reason, and of folly over discretion and good sense; every wise man would take care to assert and maintain the superiority of his reason, and not suffer himself to be enslaved and overcome by mean and foolish resentments.

2. But further, to advance to a yet higher consideration, put the case thus, or in these terms: Suffer not any affronts or injuries to get the better of your piety, or of your duty towards God.

We learn from Scripture at least, if not from the light of nature, that all manner of vengeance belongs to God alone; so that the taking upon us to avenge ourselves, is presuming too far,

is usurping upon the undoubted rights and prerogative of the Supreme Being. *To me belongeth vengeance and recompense*, says Almighty God (Deut. xxxii. 35.); or as St. Paul words it and explains it at the same time, *Vengeance is mine, I will repay*. (Rom. xii. 19.) God permits us not to revenge, or resent, our own wrongs. We are no more than fellow-creatures, and fellow-servants one with another: and if any offence be committed, it is sufficient for us to refer the complaint to him, the judge of all, and our common Lord and Master. This is no more than every master of a family will demand; that any disputes or differences in his family among his servants, be decided by him, and left to his censure and correction. God is an all-knowing judge, and will exactly weigh the merits of the cause; and will, first or last, do us justice most effectually, when we are really wronged, if we leave it to him. But if we take the affair into our own hands, and resolve to do ourselves justice, we do not only run the risk of provoking and bringing upon us fresh injuries from men; but as we are provoking God all the time, we take the likely way to draw down his vengeance, not upon our enemies, but upon our own heads. The question then, in case of offences, lies plainly thus: Will you leave it to God to punish them as they deserve; or will you take the matter into your own hands? Supposing the injury done you to be real and great, it may be better indeed for your enemies, that you should take it in hand, to revenge it; but it is much the worse for yourselves. Human power, at best, is weak, and frail; and besides, is under the irresistible check and control of the divine hand; so that it is infinitely uncertain, whether a man, ever so much disposed to revenge, can effect it. But if God undertakes to do vengeance, he does it effectually, and no arm can resist him. I say then, that in case of real injuries, the surest method of having them revenged, is to commit the cause to God. And this is certainly the best and safest method that the injured party can take, in order to have redress and satisfaction. God can recompense us a thousand ways, for any wrongs we receive at the hands of men: and if we entirely commit our cause to him, he will not only do us justice, but will shew us mercy also, and make us ample amends.

But a question here arises by the way, Whether, after a man has referred his cause to God, laying aside all thoughts of revenging himself, he may then pray to God to avenge him; or may take pleasure in observing that the divine vengeance has fallen down upon his adversary?

Much may be pleaded on both sides; but I must not run out into too tedious a digression. I shall, however, offer a few hints, and as briefly as may be. Our blessed Lord upon the cross prayed for his murderers; *Father, forgive them, &c.* And St. Stephen also did the like; *Lord, lay not this sin to their charge*. And even under the Old Testament, Solomon is commended, that, among other things in his prayer, he had not asked *the life of his enemies*. (1 Kings, iii. 11.) All this looks as if we were neither permitted to take vengeance ourselves upon any man, nor so much as to desire, or to take pleasure in, the divine vengeance when brought upon our enemies; though one might think it should be matter of joy and comfort to us, as being of God's doing, being also a kind of vindication of our own innocency, or of the justice of the cause we had engaged in.

On the other hand, it may be observed, that there are many passages in the Old Testament, in the Psalms more especially, which look like plain imprecations upon the wicked: and even in the New Testament, God comforts his elect, by assuring them, that *he will avenge them speedily* (Luke, xviii. 8.); that is, of their adversaries, as appears by what goes before; which seems to suppose, that God's avenging a good man of his enemies, may be a reasonable ground of joy and comfort to him. Add to this, that St. Paul, speaking of Alexander the copper-smith, as of one who had done him much evil, immediately subjoins, *the Lord reward him according to his works* (2 Tim. iv. 14.); which is a kind of imploring God's judgments upon him. And lastly, when St. Paul says, *If thy enemy hunger, feed him; and if he thirst, give him drink*, he enforces his advice by this consideration; *for in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head* (Rom. xii. 20.); which words, in their most natural construction, and as interpreted by the context, seem to mean, that in so doing, thou shalt accumulate the divine vengeance upon him, if he repents not. All which looks as if it were allowable,

able, in some cases, both to imprecate the divine vengeance upon adversaries, and to rejoice in it when it comes.

I have thus briefly represented the force of the arguments on both sides the question, for every reasonable man to judge of; and I will not presume to be dogmatical and positive either way: but what seems to me to come nearest to the truth, is as follows:

The peace of the world is much concerned in this; that we never avenge ourselves, but refer all vengeance to God. This is the main thing; and if this be carefully observed, we may be the less solicitous about the rest. There is a just pleasure which a good man may take, in seeing the divine vengeance fall upon very bad men, because such men are enemies to mankind; and so rejoicing in their fall, is rejoicing in the public good: and for the same reason, it may not be improper, in some cases, to beg of God to curb, restrain, or punish them, in such a way as his wisdom shall see proper; and it is of such cases as these that I understand some Scripture imprecations, if they be really such: which, besides, were pronounced by persons extraordinarily commissioned to imprecate, as from God.

As to private injuries, in which the public is very little, or not at all, concerned, there, as I conceive, there is no room left for rejoicing in the divine judgments upon the adversaries; first, because we are very uncertain whether those judgments are brought upon them on any such account as we might fondly suppose; and next, because, as we are all sinners, we know not whether we ourselves are not justly liable to the same or greater. This only we may presume to think and do, if at any time God remarkably delivers us from the rage of an enemy, by afflicting him, or taking him out of the world; we may rejoice in our happy deliverance, and thank God for his indulgence towards us; but at the same time retaining a compassionate tenderness and charity for the unhappy man. So much for this point, which came in only by the way; and from which now I return to what I was before upon.

I had been observing, that we are in no case to avenge ourselves, but humbly and modestly to refer all vengeance to God. If we do otherwise, we suffer ourselves to be overcome of evil, contrary to the ad-

vice of the text: we let our passions prevail over us; that is, over religion, conscience, duty, and the reverence we owe to God; which, at length, is not triumphing over an adversary, as some may vainly imagine, but it is meanly submitting to sin and folly, and suffering the world, the flesh, and the devil, to triumph over us.

3. Having shewn how we ought not to suffer any offence or injury to get the better of our piety towards God; I have but one step more to advance; namely, not to suffer it to prevail over our charity towards man.

This article I make distinct from the former, inasmuch as not taking revenge upon an adversary is one thing, and doing him kind offices is another. I say, then, let not any injurious usage of an enemy prevent our doing him good. A great deal of what might be said upon this article, may more properly fall under my next general head; and therefore thither I refer it. Only here I may observe, that, if any injuries provoke a man to withdraw such friendly offices as belong to humanity, he is then overcome by his resentments, and is too much a slave to his passions. It is one kind of revenge, and, sometimes, all the revenge which a man has in his power to take; and so is altogether ungenerous and unjustifiable. All that reason or Scripture allows, is, to defend and guard ourselves, as far as we innocently can, against such as mean us hurt; but not to afflict them, or put them to pain by way of retaliation; nor to leave them under hard necessity, or distress, when we can, with safety to ourselves, step in to relieve them. When an enemy is reduced so low, as even to want the necessities of life, or any way to stand in need of the succour of the man he hates, it would be a mean thing to refuse it. Every one who has any spirit of generosity, or Christian charity, would be glad, when such occasions offer, to have the pleasure of doing a kind thing, and to have it kindly accepted from him. *If thine enemy hunger, feed him; and if he thirsts, give him drink*, says the Apostle in this chapter; which now leads me to treat of the second part or precept of my text, which is positive:

II. *Overcome evil with good.* This implies all the kind offices towards an enemy, which we are capable of doing, consistent

consistent with our own safety, or with our obligations to others. Our blessed Lord's instructions upon this head, may serve as a good comment upon this part of the text; *Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you: that ye may be the children of your father which is in heaven* (Matt. v. 44, 45.), &c. This is what we are to do towards enemies, and this the way, whereby we are to overcome evil with good: only it remains to shew how, or in what sense, this kind of conduct towards them is here called by the Apostle, *overcoming evil with good*.

There are two ways of understanding this matter; as overcoming evil may either mean conquering the enemy by kindness, so that he shall cease to do us evil; for then the evil is overcome, is quashed, and put an end to; or, it may mean persisting and persevering to the last in doing good against evil (when the adversary is not at all softened, or altered by it); for this, if it be not quashing, or putting an end to the adversary's malignity, is yet being above it, and maintaining a kind of superiority over it. But both these articles will want to be explained more distinctly.

1. First, I say, the *overcoming evil with good*, may be understood of conquering an enemy by kindness, so that he may cease to malign us; for then the evil is overcome, as it is quashed and put an end to. A generous enemy will be wrought upon this way, and become a friend: though it must be owned, that men of mean and abject tempers, will be always both more insulting, and more cruel, for such kind usage. Nevertheless, the same kind usage is to be shewn to both; because we know not who may at length prove to be of a generous temper, and who not; but principally because God requires it; and if such conduct has not the desired effect, as to melting the adversary into kindness, yet we are sure to have our reward for our charity another way, at the hands of Almighty God. But, to proceed. It may frequently be observed, that, after contests or differences have arisen between man and man, if either side does but leave off saying or doing spiteful things, a quarrel soon dies, and the men become friends. How much more may we suppose such effect to follow, if either of the

parties does not only forbear every thing provoking, but, over and above, says and does kind and good-natured things to oblige his adversary? the breach will then probably be made up the sooner, and the friendship afterwards last the longer. Such a conduct contributes much to the peace of society, and to the general good of mankind; which is alone sufficient to recommend it with every wise and considering man. And that it may not be suspected that there is any thing of tameness, or mean-spiritedness, in this conduct, the advantage, in point of dignity and esteem, really lies on the side of the good-natured and peaceable man. There is a greatness of mind shewn in being above little piques, and childish altercations: there is triumph and conquest seen in the command a man has over his own temper and passions; and there is further a most glorious victory gained over his adversary, while he thus conquers him by kindness, and goes beyond him in wise conduct and generosity. Upon all which account, the kind and peaceable man is so far from sinking his character, that he raises it the more by such handsome demeanor, and attracts the reverence and esteem of all discerning judges. Besides all which, he has the pleasure and comfort of having a friend and companion to himself, instead of an enemy; and the satisfaction also of having made him such, which is like the making of a convert, or the healing of a patient; as it is laying his passions, and correcting the disorders of his mind. And this is the first way of overcoming evil with good. But because such effect does not always follow, for there are some stubborn tempers which no kindnesses can mollify, I must observe, secondly,

2. That there is yet another kind of conquest to be obtained, by persisting and persevering in doing good against evil. For though you do not thus conquer the man's pride or ill-nature, yet you conquer your own passions; and at the same time maintain such a superiority over the enemy's malice, that it shall not be able either to conquer your good-nature, or draw you off from your steady principles of love and charity. There is a kind of contest and emulation in such a case, which shall be first weary and vanquished, the malice and iniquity of one, or the patience and goodness of the other. He who abides
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and persists in doing good against evil, may be said to be a person of invincible kindness and generosity, unconquerable love and charity. In this manner, Moses held out against the infinite obloquies, murmurings, and revilings of the Israelites in the wilderness, still obliging and serving them, and praying for them. Thus also David persisted in his duty and loyalty towards Saul, notwithstanding all the ill usage he met with from him. And no imaginable rudeness, malice, or persecution, could at all move or shake his most invincible constancy and fidelity. And to name no more, our blessed Lord himself was a bright example of the like love and charity to the last, going about doing good, both to friends and foes, weeping over Jerusalem, which thirsted for his blood; and at length praying for his murderers while he hung upon the cross. This is overcoming evil with good; to stand firm and unshaken in love and kindness, against all provocations, and ill usage. It is triumphing over the adversary, to shew, that, with all his rage and inveteracy, he shall never be able so much as to tempt you to retaliate, or to move you to do like him. Let him proceed as he pleases, he shall never make you stoop to do any thing mean, or to act a part unworthy of yourself. This is noble and manly carriage: and he who thus acts, though he does not soften his adversary, yet has plainly the advantage of him, and triumphs over him. God so deals with sinners, and so should we; for, when neither his sunshine warms them into a love of him, nor his showers have any force to soften them into compliance with him; yet he persists in sending both, making *his sun to rise on the evil and on the good; and sending rain on the just and on the unjust.* (Matt. v. 45.)

I know but one objection of any moment against this conduct, which is this; that it may seem to give too much encouragement to malicious men, to persist in their iniquity; and may also strengthen their hands against ourselves, to do us the more mischief: to which I answer, that, were it really true, that it carried this single inconvenience with it; yet, so long as there are innumerable conveniencies on the other side, more than sufficient to counterbalance it, this single difficulty ought to be no objection against it. But I have this thing to add further; that the

principles which I have been maintaining, do not oblige a man to lay himself open to his enemy, or to give himself up into his power. He may do him kind offices, without making a friend or a confidant of him; may oblige and serve him, without running into his arms. *If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink.* The Scripture bids us be kind and generous; and yet bids us beware of ill men, and not to deliver ourselves up tamely, and thoughtlessly into their hands. Love and charity are one thing; easiness and folly another. Be well assured of a man's friendship, before you admit him into your retirements and confidence: but be he ever so malicious, yet serve him, at a proper distance; and oblige him also if you can, but without betraying, or exposing yourself. Indeed, as to any distant and imaginary dangers from an enemy, strengthened, in some measure, by your favours towards him, those must be risked: and God's providence is our security in such cases, as in a thousand others, where a thing equally may or may not happen. Distant surmises, and mere suspicions, are too slight to deserve any regard, or to bear any weight in this important matter.

To conclude, then: let the duty of the text stand in its full force, notwithstanding the objection which I have been answering. And now, after explaining the duty as far as seemed necessary, it remains only that we go and put it in practice. Which, that we may, God of his mercy grant, &c.

S E R M O N VII.

A good Life the surest Title to a good Conscience.

I JOHN, iii. 21, 22.

Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God: and whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

THESE words will lead me to treat of the nature and quality of a good conscience, and the comforts of it. The Apostle had before been speaking of assuring our hearts before God by the strongest evidences possible, by a true and unfeigned

unfeigned love of the brethren. *Hereby, says he, we know that we are of the truth; and shall assure our hearts, that is, pacify our consciences, before him.* Then he adds, *For if our own hearts condemn us, God will much more condemn us: inasmuch as God is greater than our hearts, his knowledge is of greater extent than ours, he knoweth all things.* But *if our hearts condemn us not*, after close and impartial examination of our conduct, *then have we, with good reason, confidence towards God; not doubting but that he will freely grant whatsoever we may properly ask of him, so long as we keep his commandments, doing those things that are pleasing in his sight.* Such appears to be the tour or turn of the Apostle's sentiments, collected from the text and context. In discoursing farther, it may be proper,

I. To state the nature and quality of a sure conscience, or clear conscience, or what we commonly call a good conscience.

II. To set forth the advantage and comfort of it.

I. The nature of a sure or clear conscience ought to be first justly stated, lest we should mistake shadow for substance, appearances for realities, presumption and vain confidence for truth and soberness. The Apostle points out the general nature of a good conscience by this mark; that *our hearts condemn us not*, and that *we know that we are of the truth*; know it by some certain rule, namely, by this, that we keep God's commandments, doing that which is pleasing in his sight. Here is a rule given, whereby we may first measure our conduct; and if our conduct be found, upon a just examination, to square with that rule, then our consciences are clear, and we may look up with a becoming confidence to God. This is a matter of great weight, and of the last importance: and yet there is no where more room for self-flattery, and self-deceit. It is extremely natural for a person to bring in a verdict in favour of himself, when he has made no examination at all, or a very superficial one, or however not so strict and severe a scrutiny as an affair of such delicacy, and withal of such moment, deserves. A man will often call it acting according to his conscience, when he acts according to his present persuasion, without ever examining how he came by that persuasion; whether through wrong education, custom, or example; or whether

from some secret lust, pride, or prejudice, rather than from the rule of God's written word, or from a principle of right reason. This cannot be justly called keeping a good conscience; for, we ought not to take up false persuasions at all adventures, and then to make those persuasions our rule of life, instead of that rule which God hath given us to walk by.

It may perhaps be said, that St. Paul himself has warranted that way of speaking: for though he had once very wrongfully and grievously, under rash and false persuasion, persecuted the church of God, yet he scrupled not to say, upon a certain occasion, afterwards, *Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God, until this day* (Acts, xxiii. 1.). But as there is no necessity of construing the words in that large sense; so there are good reasons to persuade us, that St. Paul had no such meaning. How frequently does he charge himself in his Epistles, as having been a very grievous sinner, yea *chief of sinners* (1 Tim. i. 15.), on account of his having once persecuted the church of God? How then could he modestly pretend, or with truth say, that he had lived in all good conscience, all his life, to that day? At other times, whenever the same Apostle speaks of his having a good conscience, he constantly understood it with a view only to what he had done as a Christian, in his converted state. *Herein, says he, do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men* (Acts, xxiv. 16.). This was said; in the way of answer to the false accusations of the Jews, like as the former, and occurs in the chapter next following: and the words plainly relate only to Christian conversation; not to his former Jewish one. He had lived in all good conscience, with respect to what the Jews had accused him of: for, *neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, neither yet against Cæsar, had he offended any thing at all* (Acts, xxv. 8.), from the time of his conversion to Christ. So, St. Paul's phrase of a good conscience, did not mean merely the living up to one's persuasion, of whatever kind it were, but living up to a just and well-grounded persuasion of what is consonant to the will of God. If a person acts merely according to his present ill-grounded persuasion, which he never seriously and impartially examined in-

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to, he cannot be properly said to maintain a good conscience, because, if he has any self-reflection at all, his conscience must smite him, and his own heart condemn him, for not taking more care to inform himself better. Every person is in duty bound to prove all things, so far as, humanly speaking, in his circumstances, he may, in order both to admit and to hold fast that which is good. (1 Theff. v. 21.) It is deceiving ourselves to imagine that we have a good conscience, when we have used no reasonable care in examining whether it be a right conscience, a well-grounded persuasion that we proceed upon, or not.

There is another common method of self-deceit, when a person, who well enough understands the rule he is to go by, yet forgets to apply it to his own particular case, and so speaks peace to himself, all the while that he transgresses it. It is irksome and painful to make home reflections; and it is a much easier way to take it for granted, that we have done nothing amiss, than to be critical, and prying into our own bosoms. King Saul could say confidently, even after the prophet Samuel had reproved him, that he had obeyed the voice of the Lord, and had gone the way which the Lord sent him. (1 Sam. xv. 20.) He had done it indeed in part; and, under a kind of confusion of thought (natural or artificial), he was disposed to pass that part off, for the whole, till his mistake was pressed so close upon him, that there was no room for evasion. A much better man than he (I mean David), after two very grievous transgressions, appeared to be under the like insensibility, and the like self-confidence (either blinded by the height of his station, or the strength of his passions), till the Prophet Nathan, by an affecting parable, shewed him his mistake, and then charged the matter home to him, by saying, *Thou art the man.* (2 Sam. xii. 7.) There is a kind of fascination in self-flattery, for the time, which makes a man blind to his own failings, and prompts him to speak peace to himself, when he has no foundation for it, but a fond presumption, or an overweening vanity.

But the way to have solid and abiding satisfaction, is first to examine ourselves, strictly and impartially, by the rule of God's commandments, in order to see clearly how far we have come up to it, or

how far, and in what instances, we have transgressed it, or come short of it. If, after a strict scrutiny, we can pronounce assuredly, that our heart is right, and our ways good (due allowances only made for sins of daily incurfion, or human infirmities), we may then presume to think, that we have a clear conscience in the main, and such as may embolden us to look up with a good degree of confidence towards God, as one that will mercifully accept of our prayers here, and of our souls and bodies hereafter.

I am aware of a difficulty which may arise from some words of St. Paul, which, at first hearing, may appear to clash with the doctrine of the text, as I have been expounding it. St. Paul says, *I judge not mine own self: for I know nothing by myself: yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, &c.* (1 Cor. iv. 3, 4, 5.) Do not these words sound, as if no certain judgment could, or ought to be made by any man of his own spiritual state to Godwards? And if so, what becomes of the comfort of a good conscience? Or how can we have the confidence towards God, which the text speaks of? In answer to the seeming difficulty, I may observe, first, that it is certain St. Paul could not mean to detract from the joyous comfort of a good conscience, since he more than once declared expressly, that it was what he himself enjoyed, and he was fully assured of it: besides, that no man ever expressed a more satisfactory assurance of his own final justification, than he once did, in these words: *I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.* (2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.) So far St. Paul. How then could he say, *judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come*, if that were his meaning, that a man might not judge of his own spiritual state beforehand, nor speak peace to himself upon the strength of a clear conscience? Those two suppositions are evidently contradictory to each other, and can never stand together. Wherefore we must of necessity look out for some other meaning of what St. Paul says, concerning the impropriety of judging any thing of ourselves before the final day of judgment. He was there speak-

ing of the fulfilling of the work of the ministry with the utmost exactness; and he would have no man presume to judge beforehand that he had so fulfilled it: for, though he should be able to espy nothing in himself wherein he had been to blame, had no sin to charge himself with on that head; yet that would not suffice to clear him perfectly; that is, to justify him in the strictest sense, because God might see faults, either of omission or commission, which the man himself might not be aware of: therefore, says the Apostle, judge nothing as to your faithful fulfilling your duty in every point, before the time: presume not so far: God only can judge whether you have been altogether free from blame in that article. So the meaning of the Apostle, in that place, was only to check vain presumption, and to prevent proud boasting. And it comes almost to the same with what St. James says, *In many things we offend all* (James, iii. 2.): and what St. John says, *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, &c.* (1 John, i. 8.) or to what the Psalmist intimates by saying, *Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from my secret faults.* (Psalm. xix. 12.) Now, the doctrine of a good conscience, or of an humble assurance of our being in a state of grace, is very consistent with this other doctrine, that the very best of men are sinners in God's sight, and may, in sundry instances, be found worthy of blame, more than they themselves had been ever aware of. The gospel remedy for those secret sins, those which have neither escaped our notice, or have slipped out of memory, is a general repentance, together with such kind of prayers as the Psalmist put up to the Throne of Grace, when he said, *Cleanse thou me from my secret faults.* Such kind of sins of ignorance, or of infirmity, are no bar to true peace of mind, or to the comforts of a good conscience, or to a modest assurance of our being in a state of grace and favour; provided only, that, upon a serious examination of our own hearts and lives, we do find that we indulge no known habits of sin; but use our careful endeavours, by the help of God's grace, to discharge our bounden duty in that station of life whereunto God has called us. So then, this place of St. Paul, rightly understood, interferes not at all with the doctrine of the text, as before explained. And I may

further hint, that there were some ministers of the gospel of that time, who were too much puffed up, and affected to be thought more considerable than St. Paul himself; and it was chiefly with a view to those men that St. Paul here spake so exceeding modestly of himself, in order to teach them modesty in such a way, as might give them least offence: wherefore he says, in verse the 6th of the same chapter, *These things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos, for your sakes: that ye might learn in us, not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another.* He was sensible that some of the church of Corinth magnified themselves too much, and were too much magnified by others, in the way of emulation; but it was a very tender point to speak plainly of, or even to touch upon, for fear of widening the breach, and heightening the divisions: therefore he chose that softest way of rebuke, not naming the persons who were most to blame, but naming himself in their stead; and describing, in his own person, as a minister of Christ, how humbly and how modestly every one ought to think of himself, and behave in his station.

But I return to the business of a good conscience, from which I have a little digressed, for the clearer reconciling of the several texts, and for the removing scruples. No doubt but a serious considerate man may know when he behaves as he ought to do, and may reap the comfort of it: and though we are none of us without sin, of one kind or other, but in many things we offend all, yea more than we know of (but God knows), yet a good life is easily distinguished from the life of the ungodly, and a state of grace from a state of sin: and so there is room enough left for the joy of a good conscience, where men live as becometh the gospel of Christ, perfecting holiness, to such a degree as man can be perfect, in the fear of God.

II. Having thus stated the nature, and cleared the meaning, of a good conscience, I now proceed to discourse of the comforts of it. These are pointed out, in very expressive words, by the Apostle in the text—*If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God; and whatsoever we ask, we receive of him.* What greater comfort can there be, than

conscious

conscious virtue, drawing after it the favour, the countenance, the friendship, of God, in whom all happiness centers, and upon whom all things entirely depend? If God be with us, who can be against us? What friends can we want, while in him we have all that are truly valuable? Or what blessings can we desire, but what he is both willing and able to shower down upon us, only leaving it to him to judge what is safest and most convenient for us? Whatsoever a good man asks in faith, if it be for his soul's health, that he is sure to receive; as the Apostle in the text informs us. Will he ask temporal blessings? He may, but with reserve and caution; not forgetting to add these or the like words: *Yet not my will, but thine be done.* Will he ask rather (as sure he will) spiritual blessings, as pardon and grace, holiness here, happiness hereafter? Those he may ask earnestly, absolutely, freely, and without reserve; and is sure to be heard in doing it, so long as he keeps God's commandments. There is no pleasure in life comparable to that which arises in a good man's breast, from the sense of his keeping up a friendly intercourse, a kind of familiar acquaintance with God. I do not mean an irreverent, a kind of saucy familiarity, such as hath been seen in some fawning hypocrites, or will enthusiasts; and which is as different from the true filial reverence, as the affected cringings, or nauseous freedoms of a parasite, are from the open, decent, humble, deportment of a respectful admirer. The text expresses a good man's comfort, by his having *confidence towards God*: and in the next chapter, the same Apostle says: *Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment*, or against the day of judgment: *because as he is, so are we in this world*: that is to say, we are in the same interests with him, are his retainers, and domestics of his family and household. The Apostle adds: *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment.* (1 John, iv. 17. 18.) I have cited these other texts for the clearer apprehending of what the confidence towards God means. To make it still plainer, I may add, that, like as a dutiful and obedient child, conscious of a parent's love, and of the reciprocal affection there is between them, approaches not with fearful looks, or down-cast dread, but comes with smiles

in his countenance, and joy in every gesture; so a truly good man appears in God's presence, under a joyous sense of the divine love towards him, and has none of those dreadful apprehensions which guilty men have, or ought to have, as often as they come before him. An awful distance there ought indeed to be between the creature and his creator: but where an union of wills and affections has made us as it were one with Christ, who is essentially one with God, then that awful distance brings no torment with it, but rather fills the mind with inexpressible joy and admiration.

Though St. John has said, that perfect love casteth out fear; yet St. Paul has said, *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.* (Philipp. ii. 12.) How shall we reconcile the seeming difference? It may be reconciled thus: St. John, by fear, meant a tormenting fear; for he observed, that fear, such as he spake of, hath torment in it: but St. Paul understood by fear, that kind of filial fear tempered with love, which has no such torment in it. St. Paul, in the same place where he speaks of working out our salvation with fear and trembling, immediately adds: *For, it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.* (Philipp. ii. 13.) Observe, how comfortable a reason he assigns for fear and trembling, sufficient, one would think, to remove all melancholy fears, doubts, or diffidence: and so it is. But who can think of the immediate presence of the tremendous Deity, without some trembling awe and concern upon his mind? Whenever God has been pleased to signify his approach by visible symbols and sensible appearances to frail mortals, they have instantly been filled with dread and horror. The prophet Daniel, upon such occasions, sunk down into a trance (Dan. viii. 17, 18.---x. 9.), and even the apostle John fell down as dead for a season. (Rev. i. 17.) So dreadful are the approaches of the Divine Majesty, though coming in love, when made in a sensible way, in some dazzling and glorious form. But when God comes to us to *make his abode with us* (Joh. xiv. 23.), and to work within us (which he certainly does, because he has so promised), we feel no sensible emotions: because neither the senses nor the imagination is struck by any outward appearances, but all is invisibly and spiri-

ritually performed; and there is nothing but abstract thought, and Christian recollection, that can give us any notion of the Divine presence, in such his silent and unseen approaches. However, a lively faith in it, and an undoubted experience of it, may be sufficient to affect a devout mind with a kind of trembling awe of the Divine Majesty conceived to be present, and working in us: and that consideration may best account for St. Paul's meaning, where he says: *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for, it is God that worketh in you, and so on.*—There is nothing in this matter which takes off from the transporting pleasure of a clear and good conscience, grounded upon the stable support of a well-spent life, the only sure anchor to rest upon, and that no otherwise than as it finally rests in the all-sufficient merits of Christ Jesus, which alone can supply the defects of our own righteousness, or render even our best services accepted.

But the greater the comfort of a good conscience is, the more solicitous ought we to be, that we proceed upon sure grounds, in the judgment which we make of our ourselves; and that we mistake not presumption, or self-admiration, for true peace of mind. Many marks might be mentioned, whereby to distinguish one from the other: but it may suffice to point out one which is the surest of any; namely, growth in goodness, growth in grace. The progress of the Christian life is gradual; and our highest attainments here are a still growing perfection. Examine your title to the comforts of a good conscience by this rule, and you shall find it will not deceive you. If we are daily improving in wisdom and virtue, gaining ground of our vices or passions more and more; if we find ourselves more patient under adversity, and less puffed up in the day of prosperity; if we perceive, that we can bear affronts or injuries with more calmness and unconcernedness, and are more disposed than formerly to forget and forgive; if we have greater command over our appetites, and can take delight in temperance, soberness, and chastity; if, instead of doing wrong to any man, we find ourselves more and more inclined to kindness, friendliness, and charity; if, instead of hanging back, with respect to religious duties, we find our relish for them heightened, our devo-

tions raised, and our ardors more inflamed; if our attachments to the world grow weaker and weaker, and our aspirations towards heaven every day stronger and stronger, the nearer we approach to the end of our race; I say, if we find matters thus to stand, (upon the strictest inquiry we can make into our hearts and lives,) then may we, upon sure grounds, judge favourably of our present state and circumstances, and may humbly presume that God is in us of a truth, and that we are, by the grace of God, through the merits of Christ Jesus, in the high road to salvation.

S E R M O N VIII.

The Nature and Manner in which the Holy Spirit may be supposed to operate upon us: And the Marks and Tokens of such Operation.

ROM. viii. 14.

As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

OUR present high festival (Whitsunday) which is of ancient standing in the church of Christ, is peculiarly dedicated to the honour of the Holy Spirit, a divine person, partner with the Father and the Son, in the one eternal all-glorious Godhead. Divine Wisdom has vouchsafed herein to apprise us of the relation we bear to each person, and the dependence we have upon them all, that we also (among other creatures) may pay our dutiful homage and adoration accordingly.

All the persons of the Godhead are represented, in Sacred Writ, as jointly concurring in our creation and preservation, and jointly contributing, in mysterious order, to our redemption and final salvation: but the present occasion obliges me to confine myself chiefly to what concerns the third Person, his presence with us, and his kind offices towards us.

He is set forth in the New Testament, as our Comforter abiding among us (John, xvi. 7.—xiv. 16.), and as dwelling in us (1 Cor. iii. 16.): and that, not with respect to our souls only, but even our bodies also, these tabernacles of clay: for they likewise have the honour to be considered, as the sacred temple wherein he is pleased to reside, (1 Cor.

(1 Cor. vi. 19.) They are thereby sanctified, for the present, and sealed also, for the time to come: *Sealed unto the day of their redemption*; (Eph. iv. 30.) that is to say, marked out and insured for a happy and joyful resurrection to life eternal. *For, as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God*; and therefore (as soon after follows in the same chapter) *if children, then heirs, and joint-heirs, with Christ—that we may be glorified together.* (Rom. viii. 17.) In discoursing farther, it will be proper to shew,

I. What it is to be led by the Spirit; or what it is that the Holy Spirit does for the furthering our salvation.

II. How, and in what manner, he may be supposed to act, or operate.

III. By what marks or tokens it may be seen, that he does operate upon us, and that we are led by him.

IV. What is the use and improvement which we are concerned to make of the whole.

First, As to the first particular, which relates to the Spirit's leading us in our way to salvation, it is observable, that our blessed Lord, taking his solemn leave of his disciples, a little before his passion, consigned them, as it were, over to the care and guidance of the *Holy Ghost*, the *Comforter*, who would *guide them into all truth* (John, xvi. 13.) and would *abide with them*, and with the church after them, *for ever.* (John, xiv. 16.) He repeated the same promise to them a little before his ascension into heaven, as appears from the history of Acts, i. 5. 8.

This, however, is not to be so understood, as if the Holy Ghost were now our sole conductor, exclusive of the other two Divine Persons: for our blessed Lord, in the very same place where he promises to send the Comforter to *abide with us for ever*, promises also, that the Father and Himself shall make the like abode with good Christians. *If any man love me, says he, my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him.* (John, xiv. 23.) Elsewhere, he promises to his disciples his own spiritual presence, to continue with them, as long as the church, or the world should last: *Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.* (Matth. xxviii. 20.) From all which it is plain, that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, are equally present to good

men, in all ages of the church; and that when our Lord spake of his *departing*, and *leaving the world*, he meant it barely of his bodily absence: and because, from the time of his ascension, he was to be present, only in a spiritual and invisible way, as a spirit, and together with the Holy Spirit, therefore he considered his church from thenceforwards, as being peculiarly under the guidance of the Holy Ghost; though, strictly speaking, it is under the spiritual guidance of all the three persons. Hence it is, that such spiritual guidance (which often goes under the name of grace, in the New Testament) is sometimes ascribed to the Father, sometimes to the Son, and sometimes to the Holy Ghost, as it is the common work of all; and may be indifferently, and promiscuously, attributed to any of them singly, or to all of them together. So we find mention made, more than once, of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; and of the grace of God, meaning God the Father: and yet the Holy Ghost is emphatically and eminently styled the Spirit of Grace, as being, some way or other, more immediately concerned in the work of grace, and thereby uniting true believers both with the Father and the Son.

Now, for the clearer conception of what grace means, in this emphatical sense, and of what the Holy Spirit does in the work of grace, upon the minds of the faithful, we may distinctly consider it under its several views, or divisions.

1. There is a kind of illuminating or enlightening grace given, as often as the Holy Spirit conveys and instils good thoughts, wholesome counsels, or salutary instructions; opening the understanding to receive and embrace them. To this head belongs what the Psalmist says: *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.* (Psal. cxix. 18.) And in the New Testament it is recorded, that the Lord opened the heart of Lydia, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. (Acts, xvi. 14.) It is the Spirit that gives us true light, and likewise gives it reception.

2. There is also a kind of sanctifying grace, when the Holy Spirit of God rectifies the heart, inclines the will, and meliorates the affections: for, it is God that *worketh in us both to will and to do, of his good pleasure*; (Philipp. xi. 13.) as St.

Paul testifies. This sanctifying grace is commonly distinguished into three parts or branches, called preventing, assisting, perfecting; being considered, first, as laying the early seeds of that spiritual life; next, as contributing to its growth and progress; and, lastly, as adding the finishing hand to it.

3. There is one peculiar work of the Spirit, which, though it may be reduced to one or other of the three heads of preventing, assisting, or perfecting, grace (as before mentioned), may yet deserve some special notice here: and that is, the grace of true devotion, attended with deep compunction of heart. St. Paul speaks of it in the Epistle to the Romans, in these words: *The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered.* (Rom. viii. 26.) That is to say, the Holy Spirit of God, working within, sometimes strikes the mind of good men with such ardency of devotion, and such vehement compunctions, that their hearts are too full to utter what they think; and so, for the present, they are not able to vent the pious breathings of their souls in any other way, than that of sighs and groans. The Holy Spirit is the impulsive cause of all such religious ardors, such strong convulsions of godly remorse, or godly affection; it is the work of God upon the humble minds.

These few hints may suffice to give you some general idea of the work of grace, or of what the Holy Spirit does for the furthering the spiritual life here, in order to our salvation hereafter.

Second. The next inquiry is, how, or in what manner, he may be conceived to operate, and to effectuate what he does?

In this inquiry, we ought to proceed with all becoming modesty and reverence; since we are not able perfectly to unfold the mysterious workings of the tremendous Deity upon the spirit of man. But, one thing we are certain of, in the general, that whatever is ordinarily done of this kind, is done in a gentle, moral, insinuating way, and not by mechanical, irresistible impulses, such as would take away human liberty, or reduce men to a sort of intelligent clockwork, or reasoning machines: for, upon that supposition,

every good word, or thought, would be so entirely God's, that no part of it would be ours; and so all our virtue would be mere force upon us, and therefore no virtue of ours at all; and there would be no room left for the numberless exhortations to well-doing, which Scripture so much abounds with, nor for any proper title to future rewards. It is manifest, therefore, that the operations of God's holy Spirit upon us, only prepare us for godliness, or incite us and enable us thereto; the rest must come from ourselves. Accordingly, Scripture always supposes, that, notwithstanding any the strongest interpositions of grace, men are still left capable of *resisting* the Holy Spirit (Acts, vii. 51.), and *grieving* the Holy Spirit (Ephes. iv. 30.), and even *quenching* the Holy Spirit. For, the Holy Spirit moves and inclines only, and does not compel: he leads and conducts as many as will be led and conducted by him; but does not so forcibly attract them, as to overrule all stubborn resistance, or reluctant perverseness. God has provided no remedy for malicious wickedness, and proud obstinacy: but, in such cases, the Holy Spirit commonly retires and withdraws, leaving the incorrigible and incurable to themselves, and to their own certain destruction.

If we may presume to be a little more particular upon so awful a subject, it seems that the holy Spirit of God works upon the minds of men by proper applications to their reason and conscience, to their hopes and fears; suggesting to them what is right and good, and laying before them, in a strong light, the happiness which they may attain to by obedience, and the misery consequent upon disobedience. And I may add, that one very considerable article of Divine wisdom and goodness lies in the providential ordering all human affairs, in such a manner, as may most fitly serve the purposes of grace; not preserving good men altogether from temptations; (for, how then should they improve in virtue, without the exercise proper for it?) but so restraining, limiting, and governing, the temptations, that they shall not press harder, or continue longer, than may best answer the end and design of God's permitting them. Let this suffice, in the general, with respect to the ordinary methods of grace, and the manner of the Spirit's operating.

operating. It consists partly, in the outward direction of all sublunary affairs, and partly in inward and gentle applications to the minds of men, suited to the times, seasons, and circumstances before provided.

There have been instances of other methods of grace; which may be called extraordinary; as was once seen in the miraculous conversion of 3000 persons at once; and again more particularly, in the miraculous conversion of St. Paul. Of such cases it is observable, that, though the outward means were miraculous, and certainly effectual with all who were fitly disposed; yet even there, the inward grace was not absolutely irresistible. Paul was a religious well-disposed man before his miraculous conversion, and only wanted new light and a better direction. The outward call, in that case, was miraculous: but the inward grace which went with it, was no other than what might have been resisted, and would have been resisted, had it fallen upon a perverse temper, and a stubborn heart. St. Paul himself intimates as much, where, speaking of himself, he says: *Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.* (Acts, xxvi. 19.) He might have been disobedient; but he chose to obey, being, in the main, a person of good natural probity, and not under the dominion of any malicious wickedness, or stubborn passions. We do not find that any miracles could convert the hardened Pharisees, or Sadducees, or Simon Magus: and though Elymas the sorcerer was miraculously struck blind, yet it had no saving effect upon his heart. There is a certain degree of obstinacy, which the grace of God extends not to, or attempts not to conquer. *My Spirit shall not always strive with man*, said God, with respect to the *old world*. (Gen. vi. 3.) They were gone too far, to be curable by the ordinary methods of grace: and an all-wise God would not send them an irresistible grace (which had been improper) to convert them; but he sent a flood to destroy them: so in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, he attempted not, by any ordinary or extraordinary grace, to reclaim them; but rained down fire and brimstone from heaven, to consume them. The reason of all which is, that men, considered as free-agents, must be reformed by the

gentler measures, or none; if they will not be led by the Holy Spirit of God, they shall not be driven; because then their virtue would have nothing of choice in it, and consequently would be no virtue at all, in any proper sense of the word, nor meet for a reward.—So much for my second general head. I proceed now,

Thirdly, To inquire, by what marks or tokens we may discern when the Holy Spirit operates upon us, and when we are led or conducted by him.

The marks or tokens of the Spirit's operating appear chiefly, either in checks of conscience dissuading us from evil, or in godly motions inciting us to what is right and good. For, though what passes within us of that kind is not distinguishable by the manner of it, from the natural workings of our own minds; yet revelation, in conjunction with our enlightened reason, does abundantly assure us, that every good thought, counsel, and desire cometh from above, and is the work of supernatural grace upon the heart.

But before we draw such conclusion, with respect to any particular thought which passes within, special care should be taken, that we proceed upon sure grounds in the forming our judgment of it: otherwise, we may be apt to ascribe the roving of fancy, or mere dreams of our own, to the Holy Spirit of God.

Some very good men, but of a melancholy cast, have been observed to make it a rule to themselves, in cases of perplexity, to lean to that side wherein they find most ease to their own minds; concluding, that the peace which they experience, is itself a symptom of Divine direction. The rule is a good general rule; because, in most cases, a man's own mind is his best casuist, in judging of right and wrong, of good and evil. But yet sometimes it happens, that a person may be under the influence of unperceived prejudices, or passions, which warp him to a side, and lay a bias upon him: and therefore there is no safe and certain rule to go by, in such cases, but a strict examination into the nature and quality of the action: and if, upon cool reflection, we find that what we are inwardly dissuaded from, is really evil, or what we are inwardly prompted to is really good, then may we safely and justly

ascribe such motions to the Holy Spirit of God.

As to our judging of our whole conduct, and whether, or how far, we are therein moved or conducted by the Holy Spirit, we have a safe rule to go by; namely, the rule of God's commandments. *Whoever is born of God doth not commit sin* (1 John, iii. 9.); that is, doth not allow himself in any known sinful habit or practice. *He that keepeth God's commandments* (as St. John observes) *dwelleth in God, and God, in him.* (1 John, iii. 24.) St. Paul also to the same purpose says, that, *If we live in the Spirit, we shall walk in the Spirit* (Gal. v. 25.); and because such walking is best seen by the fruits, he enumerates the fruits of the Spirit, in the same place: *The fruit of the Spirit* (says he) *is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,* (Gal. v. 22, 23.) In short, the only sure marks and tokens of our being conducted by the Spirit of God, are a serious and steadfast belief of what the same Spirit hath taught us, and a conscientious obedience to all the laws of the gospel.

Fourthly, I pass on to the fourth and last particular, namely, the use and improvement to be made of the whole.

1. One great use is, to be ever mindful of the world of spirits whereunto we belong; and particularly of that Blessed Spirit, who presides over us, and whose temple we are, while we behave as becomes us. We are used to look upon ourselves as the very lowest order of intelligent beings, and perhaps very justly: but yet I know not what other order of creatures there is which can boast of higher privileges than we; while God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, vouchsafe to make their abode with us, and to accept even of our earthly bodies (while clean and undefiled) as their common temple to dwell in.

This consideration, by the way, may serve to shew us the folly of all those, who have thought it below the Divine majesty to take upon him flesh and blood, and have made that their pretext for disputing the divinity of our blessed Saviour. For, if it is not below the majesty even of God the Father, to abide, in some sense, with flesh and blood; how can it be thought beneath the dignity of God the Son, to take our nature upon

him? Besides, true essential majesty can suffer no detriment, can never be impaired, by any gracious condescensions: but the greater the divine condescension is, the brighter is the glory: therefore, all the three persons of the eternal Godhead have condescended to dwell, in god-like manner, even with mortal man. Should not this consideration move us to set the less value upon things below, and to elevate our affections to things above?

2. Another use to be made of the present meditation is, to be ever mindful of putting up our devout prayers to the throne of grace, that the Spirit of God may always dwell with us, and never depart from us: but then, to make our prayers the more effectual, we should take care to avoid all such evil practices as may offend, or grieve, the Holy Spirit of God, and move him to desert us, or to grow estranged from us.

3. Thirdly, and lastly, since the benefit of all depends, at length, upon our own willing compliance, and hearty endeavours, let us make it our constant resolution to attend the motions, and to obey the suggestions, of God's Holy Spirit; and so to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. (Philipp. xi. 12.) While God works in us, and for us, we must also work for ourselves, or else his grace is sent in vain. Therefore, though the Psalmist prays to God, to *create in him a clean heart, and a new spirit* (Psalm. li. 10.); yet elsewhere God himself, speaking to his people, says, *Cast away from you all your transgressions, make you a new heart and a new spirit.* (Ezek. xviii. 30, 31.) So then, a good heart and a good life are God's work, and they are our work also: they are a mixture or compound of both. God will never fail to perform his part, provided only that we are not wanting in ours. Use we therefore first, the appointed means of grace, (appointed by God,) such as hearing, reading, praying, and receiving the Holy Communion; for these are the ordinary instruments of grace, the conduits or channels, in and by which God conveys it. Take we care to comply with and obey the grace of God once received, and to bring forth the fruits of it in our lives and conversations.

S E R M O N IX.

The Springs and Motives of false Pretences to the Holy Spirit; with the Rules and Marks of trying and detecting them.

I JOHN, iv. 1.

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God.

OUR present festival (Whitsunday) is the memorial of the awful coming of God's Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, pursuant to our Lord's promise; and is particularly dedicated to the honour of that divine person, the third person of the adorable Godhead. Him we ought to honour in every way that either sacred writ, or our own enlightened reason, hath pointed out to us: more particularly, in guarding with utmost care, against all abuses of that high name; against imputing any fond fancies, or follies, or frenzies, to the blessed Spirit of God. Simon Magus, disturbed in head and corrupt in heart, was ambitious of the thing, for the sake chiefly of the name; affecting to give it out, that himself was *some great one* (Acts, viii. 9.); or *some great power of God*. (Acts, viii. 10. 18, 19.) And when he could not obtain it, being altogether unworthy of it, he endeavoured (as we learn from Church-history) to make up with fiction and ostentation, what was wanting in fact; pretending, that at some times he had been the great oracle or representative of God the Father to the Samaritans; and at other times of the Son to the Jews; and again of the Holy Ghost to the Gentiles. So industrious was he to magnify himself under fair pretences, thereby hoping to draw the world after him; as he did some part of it, gaining profelytes among the ignorant, credulous, and undiscerning. This kind of traffic for fame was constantly carried on by some or other, under some shape or other, during the first ages of the church; and it has been continued in various ways and in different forms, through all succeeding ages, down to this day. It is one of the most refined artifices of Satan's policy: and God has permitted it for the trial of his faithful servants; that they may be proved and

exercised every way, and may learn to be as much upon their guard against any surprize of their understandings, as against any seduction of their wills. It is sufficient, that both the New Testament and Old have given strong repeated warnings against every temptation of that kind; and have not only commanded us to stand upon our guard, in such cases, but have also laid down marks and rules, whereby to discover, and whereby to repel, every wile of Satan, and every the subtlest engine amongst all his devices.

As to this particular, there are many cautions against it inserted up and down in the sacred writings: and I have here made choice of one which appears to be as expressive and affecting as any, delivered by St. John, the latest Apostle: *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God*, and so on: which words very plainly pointed at the false pretenders to the Spirit appearing in those early days: men that vainly boasted of their being filled with the Holy Ghost, instructed extraordinarily from above, illuminated from on high, and commissioned to teach and gather converts, in opposition to the truly authorized and regular ministers. The Apostle does not exhort us altogether to neglect or pass by every vain pretender; (for then how shall we know whether they are vain, or not?) but he bids us suspend our faith, and withhold our assent from them; and, in the mean while, to try and examine what their boasted pretences amount to. In discoursing further, my design is,

I. To inquire somewhat particularly, into the springs or motives from which those false pretences to the Spirit generally proceed.

II. To consider, by what rules or marks any pretences of that kind may be tried, and discovered to be false and vain.

III. To observe, how much it concerns every pious and considerate Christian to make the trial, and to be upon his guard in such cases.

I, I am first to inquire, from what springs or motives the false pretences to the Spirit generally proceed. I have before hinted, that vain-glory, or a thirst after fame, is often the moving spring, the most prevailing motive. But to go a little

a little deeper; self-love, of some kind or other, is the general foundation, the root of all. Many and various are the illusions of self-love; and they often prevail, not only with hypocrites, and men of double hearts, but even with well-meaning persons of honest minds, but of weak or distempered heads. Were none but ill-designing men to make false pretences to the Spirit, the temptation would be but coarsely laid, and would be less apt to deceive. The fineness of Satan's policy chiefly lies, in making use even of pious, honest, well-meaning, but unwary, persons to work with. God may pity and pardon the men so made use of for the trial of others, if their ignorance was unconquerable, or their infirmities unavoidable: if they were naturally half-witted, or half-distracted, God may make them merciful allowances; but he will make no allowances for persons of better sense, or stronger faculties, if they suffer themselves to be misled by such infatuated instruments. A warm zeal for religion may often go along with want of knowledge, or sound discretion: and nothing is more common, than for unthinking men to misreckon their own talents, and to take false measures very ignorantly of themselves. Self-love is natural to all men, and is the abiding pulse of every one's heart; which, if it be not carefully watched and guarded, will sometimes grievously impose even upon wise and shrewd men; but much more upon the careless and undiscerning. Who does not wish to be one of the favourites of Heaven, and to be extraordinarily illuminated; or conducted by God's holy Spirit? Let but a fond self-lover dwell often and long upon this deluding thought, and he will be apt by degrees, especially if otherwise full of conceit, to fancy himself so illuminated, and so conducted, as he desires to be; and then every warm fally of imagination, or every unusual emotion in his breast (coming perhaps from the tempter, or from his own fond dreams) will immediately be construed as a godly feeling, and an infallible mark of some divine impulse, some secret contact of God's holy Spirit. When the pleasing delusion is once indulged thus far, the man begins presently to fancy himself a kind of saint upon earth, or perhaps an apostle: or, if the distemper runs higher (as we have

known several instances) he may conceive himself greater than any prophet of the Old Testament, or apostle of the New: all self-illusion, and little short of downright frenzy!

It is not to be doubted, but that persons of this unhappy complexion must have some colours, some appearances, whereby to deceive their own hearts. The colours commonly are some great corporal mortifications and austerities, long watchings, long fastings, and perhaps immense pains taken in uncommanded services, such as God has not required at their hands. Their submitting to such painful services they look upon as infallible proofs of their own sincerity, and of some marvellous grace of God: wherein, again, they often deceive their own hearts, and are not aware of the secret workings and fond delusions of their own self-love: for, after all, there is not half so much self-denial shewn in those voluntary austerities, accompanied with pride and ostentation, as there is in a less pretending conduct, squared by the rule of God's commandments.

If persons, suppose, in a green age, by the practice of those austerities, can once come to think themselves wiser, and greater, and every way more considerable as teachers, than the oldest, and wisest, and best studied, divines; what a compendious method is thereby laid of arriving suddenly to deep learning without study, and to profound wisdom without the pain of thought! And who would not wish, at so cheap and easy a rate, and in so short a time, to come at the top of their profession? especially if neither their natural talents, nor acquired furniture, could afford them any reasonable prospect of ever becoming considerable at all in the common and ordinary methods. A forward ambition, joined with as much sloth, and impatience, may easily prompt a man to flatter himself in such a way: and certainly the self-denial which he exercises in some religious austerities, is not worth the mentioning, in comparison to the prodigious self-indulgence which, upon the whole, is manifestly seen in it. It is compounding for fame, reputation, and authority, by a few short voluntary penances, and by making very familiar with the holy Spirit of God; at the same time saving all the weariness of the flesh felt in hard studies,

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all the irksome labour of languages, history, and critical inquiries, which are ordinarily requisite to form a judicious interpreter of God's word, and a faithful guide of souls. While others are content to wait for wisdom until an advanced age, and to go on, the mean while, in the slow methods of labour and industry which God has appointed; these pretenders to the Spirit affect to be wise at once, and wise in a most eminent degree, wise by inspiration. Who sees not that laziness, and love of ease, and self-flattery, and eagerness for an early pre-eminence, may naturally tempt weak men to such self-delusions? I do not say that they themselves are commonly aware of the secret springs by which they are so moved, not being used to cool reflection, or sober thought. There are no charms more delusive than the charms of self-love; and the simpler men are, the less do they perceive them, and the more liable are they to be misled by them. Even children often discover a great deal of cunning which their self-love teaches them, and which they never reflect upon; neither do they so much as perceive by what springs they are actuated; though a judicious stander-by will easily look through it, and as easily account for it: such may be, such probably is the case with every well-meaning false pretender to the Spirit. As to subtle and designing hypocrites, I meddle not with their case: the finest hypocrisy may soon be discovered, and so is the less apt to deceive much, or long: but the well-meaning pretenders to the Spirit, who, through a secret self-flattery, and a cast of melancholy, first deceive themselves, are, of all men, the best fitted to deceive other persons. Their artless simplicity, together with their hearty and affectionate professions, are very apt to win upon the best-natured and best-disposed Christians, which the tempter knows full well; and he never exercises a deeper policy, or gains a greater triumph, than when he can thus decoy some of the most religious of God's servants, deluding them in a pious way, and, as it were, foiling them with their own weapons. But let every considerate Christian, in such cases, call to mind the good advice of the text; first, to try and examine the spirits pretended, whether they are of God. We are not commanded to examine, whether the pretenders

are sincere men, or hypocrites: that may often be doubtful, and it may be hard to pass any certain judgment upon the case; besides, that it does not so much concern us. For, our fault will not be the less, whether we are misled by a designing hypocrite, or a blind zealot, or a raving enthusiast. Care must be taken, not to be misled by any; neither by the cunning craftiness of one, nor by the simpleness of another, nor by the madness of a third. But we must try and examine the pretences of each, and guard equally against all. I proceed therefore to my second head of discourse, namely,

II. To consider by what rules or marks any pretences of that kind may be tried, and detected to be false and vain.

1. Boasting and ostentation are a flat contradiction to the very supposal of the ordinary graces boasted of; because humility and modesty are the very chief graces, upon which all the rest hang. If a man thinks himself endowed with the graces of the Spirit, let him shew it in his meek deportment, and by his good works: but let him not trumpet the fame of it through the world, lest his very doing it should be taken for a demonstration that he has not the Spirit of God; but that some spirit of delusion has crept in, in his stead. For, as a man, by boasting of his good breeding, does in that very act, or instance, prove himself ill-bred; and, in boasting of his wisdom, shews his want of it; so a man, who presumes to boast of the grace of the Spirit, betrays his want of grace in that very instance. Our blessed Lord rebuked the Pharisees for sounding a trumpet before them in the synagogues, and in the streets, that they might have *glory of men*, when they did their *alms* (Matt. vi. 2.): but what would he have said to men, who should be noising it abroad, how full they are, not of one virtue only, but of all virtues, and of all graces? for that must be meant by being full of the Spirit, if it means any thing. This way of sounding the trumpet before them, to draw the eyes and attention of the world after them (without miracles to prove their mission) is much more indecent, and immodest, than what the Pharisees did; besides the additional profaneness of making a very irreverent use of the tremendous name of God's holy Spirit. To be short, you may depend upon it, that a religion so noisy, so pomp-

ous, so theatrical, as what I have mentioned, is very little a-kin to the humble, and modest, and unpretending religion of Christ.

2. Another sure mark of a false spirit, is disobedience to rule and order, contempt of lawful authority, and especially any intruding into what does not belong to them, or the attempting to draw off the people of God from that regular and standing ministry which God has ordained, to follow teachers set up by their own authority, that is, by no authority at all. Such irregular practices come not of the Holy Spirit. *God is not the author of confusion, but of peace; as in all churches of the saints.* (1 Cor. xiv. 33.) St. Peter's rule is: *Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man* (that is, lawful ordinance), *for the Lord's sake.* (1 Peter, ii. 13.) Indeed, the Apostles had special commission from God to oppose human ordinances, and to disturb the religions then prevailing, which were false religions: but they had the power of working miracles, which were their credentials to authorize them in it, and their heavenly warrants for what they did: otherwise, their methods of proceeding would have been both unwarranted and vain.

When our pious Reformers, about two hundred years ago, went about the restoring religion to its ancient purity, they did it in a regular and orderly way, under the direction and countenance of the ruling powers, and with a due regard to such a regular ministry as Christ had appointed in his church. Those excellent men were indeed full of the Spirit, which appeared in their wise counsels and exemplary conduct, and was visible, in a manner, to all good men; unless we may except themselves, whose great humility and modesty would scarce permit them to see those shining graces of their own, which could not be hid from the observing world. Under such a regular and authorized ministry, so justly settled, our church (God be thanked) has subsisted and flourished, and does to this day: and they who any way presume to disturb that comely order, or to throw any contempt upon it, only to draw disciples to themselves, cannot be led by the Spirit in such attempts; except it be a spirit of delusion, altogether opposite to the holy Spirit of God.

What, though they pretend to be

ministers of righteousness, and affect to outvie others in some strictnesses of their own, (loose all the while in the main things, which are of the last importance to peace, order, and unity,) is there any thing strange in such conduct? There were Christian teachers in the first age, who vied even with St. Paul, and affected to set up a stricter and purer religion than he could pretend to, in order to bring him under contempt. But what said he of them, writing by the Spirit of God? He said thus: *Such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ; and no marvel; for Satan himself is* (sometimes) *transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his* (Satan's) *ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their work.* (2 Cor. xi. 13, 14, 15.) What avail magnificent words, and smooth speeches? Perhaps some false pretenders may labour earnestly to convert men from gluttony and drunkenness, from cursing and swearing, from fornication and adultery, or the like. Well: what is there of this kind, which is not done by the regular ministry, and done also in a more regular, and much more edifying way? But if, while such pretenders endeavour to draw men off from some vices, they lead them into others as bad, or worse; namely, into faction and schism, into sidings and parties, into a contempt of rule, order, and authority, and into a secession from their proper pastors, their much more knowing and more faithful guides (besides turning the minds of the people off unto fables and reveries, instead of wholesome truths, and encouraging them in the wantonness of itching ears); I say, if such pretenders behave in this way, it will be manifest to all men who have their senses exercised, that they have not the Spirit of God to direct them in what they do.

3. Another sure mark of a false spirit, is the laying down deceitful rules or tokens whereby to judge, whether, or when, a man has the Spirit of God. There have been many, both in former and later times, who have laid great stress upon I know not what sensible emotions, or violent impulses, coming upon them at times, which they boldly and rashly impute to the Holy Spirit; presuming also to date their conversion or new birth (as they call it) from such fanciful impressions. There is not one syllable in sacred writ to

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countenance the notion of such impulses : it is all mere fiction, invention, presumption, and exceeding dangerous in its issue or tendency. For, by that blind rule, a man may very easily mistake the suggestions of Satan, for divine impulses : therefore, if they do indeed feel any emotions extraordinary, the first and most important inquiry is, whether those emotions are not really Satan's illusions, rather than divine impressions ; or, whether they are not rather marks of possession, than of inspiration ? Confidence is no argument in a dark affair : but it is the grand deceiver's artifice to hoodwink forward men in a blind presumption, and to blow them up into an assurance beyond their evidence.

There is but one certain rule whereby to know when we are led by the Spirit ; and that is, the rule of God's commandments. When we so think, and so do, as the Spirit of God has directed in God's holy word, then, and then only, are we sure that we are led by the Spirit, or born of the Spirit. St. John has said all in a very few words : *Whoever is born of God doth not commit sin* (1 John, iii. 9. v. 18.) ; that is, doth not allow himself in any known sinful practices. There is the mark, and the only true mark, of regeneration, and of the spiritual life. Let every man examine himself by this rule ; and when they can, upon sure grounds, speak peace to their own consciences, then let them attribute the glory of it to God's holy Spirit, for that is right ; but let them not blaze it out to the world, however certain they are of it ; for that will be seeking honour of men, and endeavouring to share with the Holy Spirit in that glory which belongs to him only : and it will be forfeiting the favour of that very Spirit whereof they so proudly boast. The Spirit has not given us leave to boast of his favours for our own glory or fame ; much less to do it for the sake of pre-eminence, or to make others look less in comparison. Such affectation of pre-eminence cometh not from above, but is a sad token, yea, and a fatal symptom, of an earthly and a sensual spirit.

I am aware, that the false pretenders to the Spirit have often laid hold on that text of St. John, warping it unnaturally, so as to draw it to favour their own fond delusions. They first take for granted, that they are born of God (which is their

fond presumption), and then they conclude that they are without sin. This is vilely perverting and abusing the text : for they ought first to know, that their ways are right, and then to draw their conclusion ; and not vainly to presume first that they have the Spirit, and then from thence to conclude that their ways are right. But such has often been the self-delusive method of vain pretenders : and they have sometimes carried it so far as to argue, that since they are saints, and born of God (that is, in their own fond imagination), they cannot be guilty of sin ; but let them do what they please, the Spirit is to warrant and sanctify all ; for God sees no sin in his saints. This is turning the tables much in the same way as the Romanists have often done with respect to their pretended infallibility. Give them a thousand plain proofs that they have erred, and do err ; and they will answer all by telling you, that they cannot err. In like manner, tell some false pretenders to the Spirit, that they are guilty of such and such manifest iniquities, and prove it upon them by plain evidence of fact, they will persist in it that they cannot sin ; because (which is their vanity) they are, in their own conceit, born of God, and led by the Spirit. How dangerous a principle this is, how productive of all ungodliness, and of the most shocking impieties, was too sadly seen in the last century ; and stands upon record in the histories of those distracted times. But enough hath been said of the rules or marks whereby to try and detect every false pretender to the Spirit.

III. And now, for an application of the whole, give me leave briefly to suggest, how much it concerns us to be upon our guard in such cases.

Religion, like all other weighty concerns, is best carried on in the calm, regular, and sedate way ; and therefore great care should be taken, to keep up the old and well-tried methods, rather than to change them for new devices, which will never answer. If sinners will not listen to the Spirit of God speaking by the Scriptures, and by a regular ministry, they will not listen to the same Spirit supposed (but vainly supposed) to speak in the undigested, incoherent, extemporary, effusions of raw teachers. It is easy for warm zealots of distempered minds to throw reflections upon the wiser and more considerate guides, who come not up to their

their degrees of unnatural heat and ferment: but a small knowledge of mankind will suffice to shew, that they who will not be converted by the cool, calm, rational methods, will never be wrought upon, as to any good and lasting effect, by eagerness and passion. If sinners, wedded to their darling vices, will not be regularly reasoned into a change of life, we must not become as mad in one way as they are in another, in hopes to recover them to their senses: for that, instead of reclaiming, would but harden them so much the more. The world, indeed, generally, is bad enough, always was, and always will be; but still we must not take upon us to use any affected and unjustifiable methods in order to mend it; which, in reality, would not mend it, but make it worse. We must bring men to God, in God's own way, if we hope to compass it at all. The making use of wrong means for the sake of a good end, is nothing else but doing evil, that *good may come*, which is a dangerous and detestable practice (Rom. iii. 8.). I say, then, that, when the ministers of Christ have done all that is prudent and proper, and the effect does not answer, they must not run wild lengths, in order to gain their point: for, God will say to such persons, if you could not prevail by methods of my appointment, how could you hope to do it by weak devices of your own? You have run wide, and far, to make profelytes; but who sent you? or who required it at your hands? There is as much mischief in over-doing, as in under-doing; both are equally transgressions of the divine laws, and deviations from the rule of right. Are they eager and impatient to bring sinners to a sober life? It is well they are, and we commend them for it: but there is one thing of still greater importance to them, which ought to be attended to in the first place; which is, to rest content with God's appointed methods of reforming the world, and to proceed no farther than he has given leave; to make use of sound judgment and discretion in an affair of that high concernment; and to submit to stop where God requires it, as well as to run on where he has sent; otherwise, religion will not be promoted, but greatly obstructed and exposed; and the world will not be made wiser or better, but ten times wilder than before.

These things I have here laid before you in as plain words, and in as strong a light, as I could.

May that Divine Spirit, whereof I have been speaking, dwell richly in us, in all wisdom, and in all virtues and graces; particularly, in soundness of mind, and in humility of heart, and in purity of life and manners. Such are the fruits, such the marks of the Spirit's presence with us, and of his love towards us; which, that we may evermore plentifully enjoy, here and hereafter, God of his mercy grant, through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

SERMON X.

The precise Nature of the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

MATT. xii. 31, 32.

Wherefore I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

THESE words will lead me to treat of the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost; a matter which has been much talked of, and not always rightly understood; for which reason, I the rather choose to discourse upon it.

It will be convenient, in the first place, to observe how, and upon what occasion, the words of the text were brought in. We have an account in this chapter, of our Lord's healing a blind and dumb man who had been possessed by a devil. The Scribes and Pharisees who came from Jerusalem, and observed what was done, very maliciously attributed that great miracle, which our Lord had wrought by the Spirit of God, to the assistance of the Devil. *This fellow*, said they (speaking in contempt of him) *doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils.* (Matt. xii. 24.) Our blessed Lord, well knowing the spite and venom of that execrable calumny, takes them up roundly for it; first confuting their cavils, and next, rebuking their insolence, in very plain and strong terms. He puts them in mind how absurd and contradictory to common

common sense it must be, to imagine that the devils should be no wiser than to differ and disagree among themselves, in a matter relating to their common interest, which would be destroying their own kingdom. *If Satan cast out Satan, how shall then his kingdom stand?* (Matt. xii. 26.) After this, he retorts their own calumny upon them, in order to manifest their grievous partiality and self-condemnation: *If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children* (your own friends the exorcists) *cast them out?* (ver. 27.) If they cast out devils by the help of God, calling on the God of Abraham, why am I, who do the same things, and greater, in the name of the same God, charged with doing them by the help of the Devil? He goes on to a third consideration, drawn from the nature of his doctrine, and from the whole tenor of his life and conduct, as being directly opposite to the Devil's interests, and plainly shewing, that he was so far from being a confederate with Beelzebub, that he was his most avowed and formidable enemy; binding that strong prince in chains, rifting his house, and spoiling his goods. These things being plain and undeniable, what unaccountable malice must it be in the Pharisees, and how grievous their sin, to impute the miracles wrought by a divine power, to the prince of the devils? Our blessed Lord, therefore, closes his reply with this smart and tremendous rebuke: *Wherefore I say unto you, that all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.*

The phrases and idioms of speech (here made use of) may require some explanation, before we come to the matter contained in them. *All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven.* The words are not to be taken absolutely, as if all kinds of slanders and calumnies should be forgiven (for many, without question, while unrepented of, never will be forgiven); but they are to be understood comparatively, as amounting to this—that all other unrighteous blaming or censuring, either of things or of persons, shall sooner and more easily be forgiven, than the blaming and slandering the holy Spirit of God, that is, God himself. To revile angels, or men, is tolerable, and pardonable, in comparison: but to strike

higher still, and to revile even God himself, is an unpardonable impiety. Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man (against Christ considered merely as a man), calling him, for instance, a deceiver, a glutton, a wine-bibber, and the like; that, though a grievous sin in itself, yet being slight in comparison, may the more easily be forgiven: *But whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be so easily forgiven, neither in this world, nor in the world to come.* In discoursing farther, my design is,

I. To examine what the sin or blasphemy against the Holy Ghost means, and wherein precisely it consists: where, by the way, I shall take notice also of some erroneous accounts of it.

II. I shall consider the heinous nature and aggravations of it, together with the penalty attending it, or consequent upon it.

III. I shall inquire whether any sins committed at this day are the same thing with it, or which come the nearest to it.

I. I am to examine what the sin, or blasphemy, against the Holy Ghost, means, and wherein precisely it consists.

I said, sin or blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, because some call it the sin against the Holy Ghost, though Scripture itself never calls it any thing else but blasphemy; which is worth the observing. For, from thence we may be assured, that this sin (whatever it be) ought to be reckoned among the sins of speech, among the offences of the tongue. All the sins which men commit are reducible to three heads, as being either in thought, in word, or in deed; now, the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost can properly be referred to the second only of the three now mentioned; it lies in words, is committed by speaking, and particularly by evil-speaking; by reviling and defaming the holy Spirit of God. In the text, it is called *speaking against the Holy Ghost*: and, by St. Mark, it appears, that the sin consisted in something which the Pharisees said. For it is there remarked, as the sum and substance of the guilt they were chargeable with, that they said of Jesus, that *he hath an unclean spirit.* (Mark, iii. 30.) And it is farther observable, that our blessed Lord, in the close of his discourse upon that occasion, pronounces thus: *Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall*

shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. (Matt. xii. 36.) Idle words here mean malicious or impious expressions; alluding still to the main subject of his discourse, the spiteful and opprobrious words which the Pharisees had impiously thrown out against the Spirit of God. To be short, then, the sin, or blasphemy, against the Holy Ghost, was the belying, slandering, or reviling, the divine Spirit, by which our Lord wrought his miracles, ascribing them to the devil.

There may be, and there have been, several offences committed against the Holy Ghost, which yet do not amount to the blasphemy against him specified in the text. There is such a thing as *grieving the holy Spirit* (Eph. iv. 30.), and *quenching the Spirit* (1 Thess. v. 19.), when men refuse to hearken to his counsels, to follow his motions, or to obey his calls. But this is not blaspheming him. There is also what St. Stephen calls *resisting the Holy Ghost* (Acts, vii. 51.), which is opposing him with an high hand, and rebelling against him, and is a very heinous sin; and yet neither is that the same with blaspheming and slandering him, which is what those Pharisees were guilty of. Ananias and Sapphira grievously affronted the Holy Ghost in telling him a lie, either presuming upon his ignorance, as not knowing it, or upon his patience, as if he should have connived at it: but yet, that was not so bad as what the Pharisees did in ascribing his works to the devil. The malicious telling a lie of him, to defame and slander him, was a more heinous offence than the telling a lie to him, under a weak and foolish persuasion. There is also another way of affronting the Holy Ghost, by vilifying his operations; which yet comes not up to the sin of the text. Upon the Day of Pentecost, when the disciples, full of the Holy Ghost, began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance, there were some standing by, who, mocking, said, *These men are full of new wine* (Acts, ii. 13.), vilifying the operations of the Spirit, as the effects of drunkenness: but the men who said it, said it perhaps wantonly or ignorantly, rather than spitefully or maliciously. They might not know that the disciples really spake with other tongues; but being unacquainted themselves with the languages then spoken, they took them all to be

jargon, such as men might utter under some disorder of mind, occasioned either by wine, or by frenzy: and so they accounted (as they thought) for the thing in a natural way, not suspecting any thing supernatural in it. But the Pharisees, who are charged with being guilty of blaspheming the Holy Ghost, they very well knew that what they had seen done, could not be accounted for in a natural way; and yet such was their spleen and rage against the gospel, that they chose rather to impute the miracles of our Lord to the devil, than to acknowledge the divine hand which was so visible in them, that they themselves could not but see it, had they been at all disposed to it.

I may here also mention Simon Magus, as a person who very highly affronted the Holy Ghost, when he offered money for the purchasing his miraculous gifts. But neither was that any such direct blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, as what the text mentions: for he had some respect and veneration for the miracles he saw wrought, and for the author of them; and was very far from imputing them to the assistance of the devil.

The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost was something worse still than any thing I have yet mentioned: it was defaming the holy Spirit of God, and God himself, under the execrable name of Beelzebub; it was reviling, and that knowingly and desperately, the divine works as diabolical operations. In this, as I conceive, and in this precisely, consisted that blasphemy which shall never be forgiven, the sin against the Holy Ghost.

Nevertheless, it must be owned, that many wise and good men, both ancient and modern, have been of different sentiments in this article.

Some, with St. Austin, maintaining that all sins are pardonable upon repentance, have resolved the blasphemy of the Holy Ghost, unpardonable sin, into final hardness and impenitency: but final impenitency is one thing, and blasphemy is another: and final impenitency is an error in a man's whole conduct; whereas the blasphemy of the text is one particular crime, and committed by reviling words, as observed above. So that final impenitency is not the sin here signified: and, for the same reasons, we may conclude, that a total and final apostacy, which some take to be the sin against the

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Holy Ghost, is very different from it, tho' it is certainly unpardonable as much, or perhaps more than the other.

Some, with Origen and the Novatians of old, have imagined, that sins committed after baptism, are sins against the Holy Ghost: but there is the same objection, besides many more, against this opinion, as against the two former, and it has very long and very deservedly been exploded by all sober divines.

Some say, that every malicious resisting, or opposing the gospel-truths, when sufficiently propounded, is the sin against the Holy Ghost: but infidelity is one thing, and blasphemy another: and the sin which the text censures, consists, more in reviling, than in resisting, as before observed: so that neither is this account at all satisfactory.

There is one more remaining still, which has been esteemed as highly plausible, and which has met with several very considerable abettors. It is, that the holding out obstinately against the last dispensation, the dispensation of the Spirit, commencing after Christ's ascension, was the sin against the Holy Ghost. They who maintain this opinion, are obliged also to maintain, that the Scribes and Pharisees, who attributed our Lord's miracles to the devil, were not then, and therein, guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost. They plead, that those blaspheming Pharisees were not yet excepted out of the general pardon offered to as many as would repent and believe; but that our Lord himself prayed for their forgiveness upon the cross, which shews that they were yet capable of pardon. They further add, that the Holy Ghost was not yet given till our Lord ascended, and therefore could not, properly speaking, be blasphemed before that time: and that the blaspheming and resisting him then, being holding out against the very greatest miracles, the strongest proofs, and the last remedies; this of course must be the most sinful and provoking obstinacy that could be, and on that account is pronounced unpardonable.

These reasons are specious: but then there is no account given how it comes to pass, that neither in the Acts of the Apostles, nor in any of the Epistles, is there a word said by way of reproof, or caution against blaspheming against the Holy Ghost; and that it should never

have been mentioned, but by our Lord himself, at a time when no body was capable of committing it: and yet, by all the circumstances of our Lord's discourse at that time, one would be very apt to conclude, that those blaspheming Pharisees were then verily guilty of the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. Nay it seems further, that St. Mark's comment upon the case, may be alone sufficient to decide the doubt. For after reciting our Lord's dreadful sentence against such as should blaspheme against the Holy Ghost, he immediately adds, *because they said, he hath an unclean Spirit.* (Mark, iii. 30.) What is this but declaring in so many words, that the reviling the Holy Spirit as an unclean Spirit, was the blasphemy our Lord spake of, and was then committed by those blaspheming Pharisees?

As to what is objected, that those very Pharisees were yet capable of pardon, because our Lord upon the cross prayed for their forgiveness; it may as reasonably be said, on the other hand, that those also who rejected the last dispensation of the Holy Ghost were capable of pardon; for St. Stephen prayed for the forgiveness of those who stoned him, though he had before told them, that they had *resisted the Holy Ghost.* (Acts, vii. 51.) This objection therefore returns upon the objectors, and equally affects either their interpretation of the sin against the Holy Ghost, or ours. Besides, the objection goes upon the supposition that the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is absolutely unpardonable, which indeed the text does seem to say: but yet good critics have observed, that according to the Hebrew idiom, the words may, or rather must bear a softer construction; importing only, that of all kinds of slander and calumny, slandering the Holy Ghost is most daring and impious; and that any other calumnies will sooner meet with pardon than that will. But supposing the sin to be absolutely unpardonable, then it must be said, that our Lord's praying for the forgiveness of his enemies upon the cross, is to be understood only of his praying for the Jews in general, and not of his praying for those persons in particular who had been guilty of the unpardonable sin.

As to the other objection, that the Holy Ghost could not be blasphemed at that time, because he was not yet given; it is of very little weight. Our Blessed Lord

most undoubtedly had the *Holy Spirit always residing in him* without limitation or measure: (John, iii. 34.) and he himself professes, that it was *by the Spirit of God* that he cast out *devils*: (Matt. xii. 28.) so that the blaspheming that divine power by which he wrought his miracles, was plainly blaspheming the Holy Spirit. It is true that the Holy Ghost was not yet given in full measure to our Lord's disciples, but to our Lord himself he most certainly was; and therefore the objection, in this case, is slight, and comes not up to the point.

Upon the whole, then, I conclude as before, that the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost was the imputing our Lord's miracles to the devil; and that that dreadful sin was committed by those very men who so reviled, slandered, and traduced that divine power by which he wrought them.

II. The heinousness of that sin, which was the second particular I proposed to go upon, may be competently understood from what hath been already said, and will not need many words more.

It was a most wicked and impudent lie and slander upon the Holy Spirit, and was flying, as it were, in the face of God. One would think, when God himself interposes, giving the divine signal in plain uncontroverted miracles, that it might become all men to be mute, and to lay aside their otherwise unconquerable rancour and prejudice: but the Pharisees were so resolute and so outrageous in reviling every thing that gave any countenance to Christ and his gospel, that they would not spare even God himself, but called him Beelzebub, spitefully defaming his most divine works, as being nothing else but diabolical impostures. They saw the miracles of our blessed Lord, and were very sensible that they were real and true miracles: they knew also that they were wrought in direct opposition to the devil and his kingdom, having all the fair appearances possible of being divine: nor would they have scrupled to have received them as divine, had they been wrought by any one else, excepting Christ or his disciples: but such was their inveterate hatred and inveteracy against him and his, that, at all adventures, contrary to all candor or equity, and in contradiction to reason and common sense, they resolved to say however, scarce to

believe (for they hardly could be so stupid), that he was in league with the devil; and that all his mighty works, which he wrought in the name of God, were the works only of Beelzebub, the prince of the devils. There could not be a more insolent slander, or a more provoking outrage against the divine Majesty, than this was. All other calumnies, against men, or against angels, come short of this; for it was calumniating God himself, the tremendous and most adorable Deity; and was done very maliciously, and designedly to hinder and obstruct, as much as possible, the first planting of the gospel, to the universal hurt and detriment of mankind: in a word, it was sacrificing the honour of Almighty God, and both the present and future happiness of men, to their own private humours and party passions; being resolved to take up with any wretched cavil, any improbable and self-contradictory lies and slanders against God, rather than permit the honest and well-meaning people to believe in Christ Jesus upon the brightest evidence of his miracles.

Such was the heinous nature, and the transcendent guilt of blaspheming against the Holy Ghost, in that instance: and therefore it is, that our blessed Lord took so particular care, first, to confute the calumny, and, next, to pass a most righteous, but dreadful censure upon the sin contained in it. The divine vengeance should pursue a crime of that deep die both in this world, and in the world to come. The offenders in that kind, being unreclaimable and incurable, should by the just judgment of God, be sealed up to everlasting destruction; like Pharaoh, or like Judas, like Sodom, or like Gomorrah, ripe for perdition, and fit to be delivered over to eternal ruin.

Having thus largely considered what the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost means, and how heinous a sin it was; it remains now only,

III. To inquire whether any sin committed at this day, are the same thing with it; or which of them come the nearest to it. Of this very briefly, having no room to enlarge.

1. First, for the sake of the over-tender and scrupulous consciences, I would observe, that roving, and which some call blasphemous thoughts, which rise up accidentally, and as accidentally go on again

again, are nothing a-kin to the sin which I have been speaking of; which consisted in premeditated lies and slanders against God, formed with design to obstruct or darken the evidences of the true religion, and to prevent others from looking into them, or being convinced by them. None but professed Atheists, or Infidels, can be guilty of such spite and malice against the Gospel-salvation. No one, while he believes the Christian religion, and seriously professes himself a member of Christ's church, can be guilty of the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

2. I observe, secondly, that even the Atheists or Infidels of these times, can scarce come up to the same degree of guilt with the Pharisees of old; because they have not seen the miracles of Christ with their own eyes. It is some mitigation of their sin, and it makes their infidelity the more excusable, that they have not, altogether, so strong and glaring evidences of the truth of Christianity, as those had who lived in the first ages, and saw the wonderful works of God. Rational and historical evidence may be as convincing as the other, when duly considered: but, as it strikes not upon the senses, it does not awaken the attention, and alarm every passion of the soul, in such a degree as the other does. For which reason, the unbelievers of our times, though abandoned and profligate men, are not, altogether, so blameable in the opposition they make to Christianity, as the unbelievers of old time were. They may indeed, at this day, attribute the miracles of Christ and his Apostles (which they read of in credible history) to the devil, as the Pharisees of old did; and this will be blaspheming the Holy Ghost: but it will not be exactly the same sin; not the same in degree (though in kind the same) because circumstances are different; and upon the circumstances depend the heightening aggravations.

Nevertheless, it must be said, that the obstinate rejecting the miracles of our Lord and of his disciples (which have been so fully attested), and much more the ridiculing and bantering them, and the endeavouring to run them down by lies and slander (as the way of some is); this is a very high and heinous crime, as well as horrid blasphemy; especially if committed in a Christian country, and in a knowing age, and where men have all

desirable opportunities of learning the truth, as well as the strongest motives offered for submitting to it. Scoffers of this kind come very little short of the Pharisees of ancient time, either in spleen and malice, or in perverseness and hardness of heart, or in an impious and desperate defiance to God and Christ, and to the Holy Spirit of both. From such blasphemers turn away, and have nothing to do with the tents of these wicked men, lest ye be consumed in their iniquities. Look upon them as vessels of divine wrath, sons of perdition, prepared for vengeance, which will either suddenly overtake them in this world, or will fall the heavier upon them in a world to come. The Christian religion has been so abundantly proved and settled by great variety of evidences, beyond reasonable exception, that all gain-sayers are now left without excuse. It has had the concurrent testimony of Christ and his Apostles, and both established by many and great miracles, unparalleled and uncontrolled: and were there nothing else, its prevailing and triumphing so much, so early, and so long, over Jewish superstition and Pagan idolatry, is itself a miracle as great as any, and manifestly shews, that the finger of God was in it, and that an Almighty power went along with it. What remains then, but that we learn from all, to set a just prize and value upon this our most holy profession; evermore defending and maintaining it against all opposers, and adorning the same, as it becomes us to do, with suitable lives and conversations.

S E R M O N XI.

The Case of Deceivers, and Deceived, considered.

EPHES. iv. 14.

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.

HERE are two sorts of persons marked out by the Apostle in the text, the deceivers and the deceived; the one, subtle and crafty, and full of intrigue; the other, easy and credulous, and unsuspecting; the one, supposed to have all the wiliness of the serpent, without the

innocency of the dove; the other, all the tameness and simplicity of the dove, without the serpent's wisdom. Both are blameable, though in different respects, and not in the same degree; one, for abusing and misemploying their talents, and the other, for not employing them at all, to discern between true and false, between good and evil. Both are accountable to God as delinquents; one, for high contempt, and the other, for great supineness and neglect. The world has never been without both these kinds of men, since men have multiplied upon the earth, and sin and folly have taken place among them. The church of Christ, from the beginning and downwards, has suffered much by both. Heresies and schisms have disturbed its peace and broken its union; while crafty and intriguing men have begun the quarrel, and weak credulous men have run blindly into it. It was the design of our blessed Lord, when he first founded his church, to prevent, as much as possible, all confusion and discord, and to provide for its then present, and future peace.

With this view, as the Apostle here in this chapter observes, he instituted a ministry, and appointed proper officers to instruct his people, and to lead them in the way everlasting. *He gave some, Apostles; and some, Prophets; and some Evangelists; and some, Pastors and Teachers; for the perfecting of the Saints, for the work of the Ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; 'till we all come in the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect Man, &c.* (Eph. iv. 11, 12, 13.) Such was the provision made at the first planting of the church, to preserve its unity, to bind and cement it together by the ministry and good offices of Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers. The first three offices lasted for a time only, and and ceased by degrees, as there was less and less occasion for them; but Pastors and Teachers, as they will be always needful, so will they be continued always in constant succession, till the end of the world. As there is no new church to form, after the foundation laid by Christ and his Apostles; nor any new doctrines to be published beyond what they have taught; so there is no need of officers extraordinary, such as were Apostles, Prophets, and Evangelists, after a church has been once raised, and a rule fixed and

settled for all times to come: it is sufficient then, to have a standing ministry, in succession, to preach and publish that rule, and so to keep up in all after-ages what was once delivered to the Saints.

But, as neither the Apostles themselves, nor prophets, nor our Lord's own presence with mankind, was then sufficient to hinder evil-minded men from sowing divisions, or unstable men from running in with them; so neither is it to be expected, that the ordinary ministers, in after-ages, can with all their endeavours prevent the like irregularities, supposing them ever so sincere and intent upon it.

But it is further to be considered, that they themselves are but weak and frail men, and they have no such infallible assistances, or divine inspirations, as the Apostles had, nor are they proof against such temptations as are common to men; so that it is not impossible even for them to fall from their own steadfastness, and to desert their rule; and so, in effect, to become deceivers and seducers, instead of being proper instructors of the church of Christ. And whenever such cases as these happen, it is a dangerous snare to common Christians, who will be most at a loss what course to steer, when the very guides themselves differ, and draw contrary ways. This however is a case which may be supposed, and which has often appeared in fact. Divine wisdom has not thought proper to provide any infallible remedy against it, but leaves it for a trial of men's ingenuity and sincerity in such instances; that it may be seen what care and pains honest men will take to inform themselves right in any doubtful circumstances, and that they who are approved may be made manifest. In discoursing farther, my design is,

I. To consider the case of deceivers, or seducers, who, in their slight and cunning craftiness, lie in wait to deceive.

II. To consider the case of the deceived, who in their great simplicity, or credulity, are apt to be tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine.

III. I shall suggest some advices proper to prevent our falling in with either, concluding with some brief application of the whole, suitable to our present circumstances.

I. First, I propose to consider the case of deceivers, or seducers, such as, by their slight, and cunning craftiness, lie in wait to deceive.

And here it will be proper to inquire, upon what motives, or with what views, men are led thus to beguile and misguide others. The particular motives in such cases may be many; but they are all reducible to these three heads, pride, avarice, voluptuousness; that is to say, love of honour, or profit, or pleasure.

1. To begin with the first. There is oftentimes a great deal of pride and vanity in starting odd notions, and broaching new doctrines. It is pretending to be wiser than the rest of the world, and is thought to be an argument of uncommon sagacity. Upon this foot, some are perpetually in quest of new discoveries. Nothing pleases them, if they have not the honour of inventing it, or of reviving it in their times. It is objection enough against common truths, that they are common, and in every body's hands. There is no glory to be gained by traversing this beaten road; it is but low and dull employment: but if they can open a new way, and strike out a new track which no man has discovered, there is the triumph and the exultation. When once a man has thus far given a loose to his vanity, and thinks himself significant enough to be head of a sect; then he begins, first, to whisper out his choice discoveries to a few admirers and confidants, who will be sure to flatter him in it; and, next, to tell aloud to all the world, how great a secret he had found out, with the inestimable value of it. And now at length comes in the use of slight and cunning craftiness, and all imaginable artifices; first, to find out proper agents to commend and cry up the conceit; next, to spread it in the most artful manner among the simple and least suspecting; and after that, to form interests, and make parties; and so, if possible, to have a public sanction set to it, or a majority at least contending for it. This frequently is the end and aim of novellists and seducers. They are, first, fond of their own conceits, which is their pride and vanity; and next, impatient to make profelytes, and to draw the world after them, because every convert gained is a compliment to their judgment, and the greater the numbers are, the greater their glory. Love of fame and glory is a very strong passion, and operates marvellously in persons of a warm complexion. Even St. John the Apostle, with all his gifts and heavenly endow-

ments, was slighted by Diotrephes, who set up against him. *I wrote unto the church, says that divine man, but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them, receiveth us not.* (3 John, i. 9.) Diotrephes was a Christian, and probably a Christian priest too, and thought himself considerable enough to form a sect, and to head a party in the church, even against St. John. He loved to have the pre-eminence: ambition, it seems, was his motive: and as he wanted not slight, or cunning craftiness, whereby he could impose upon the weak and ignorant, and mislead them with every wind of doctrine; he was able, in a good measure, to maintain his ground, and to keep himself in countenance, though in direct opposition to the greatest man in the church, the only then surviving Apostle. Having seen how pride and ambition prompt and incite many to become deceivers, or false teachers,

2. Next let us observe how avarice, or love of profit, may sometimes do the same thing. There is a gain to be made, in some junctures, by perverting the truth, and deceiving the populace. Men who are not worthy to teach in the church, or who have been set aside for their insufficiency or immorality, may bring up new doctrines, and draw disciples after them, for the sake of protection and maintenance, or for filthy lucre. With such, the vending of false doctrine is a trade, and preaching a merchandize. They must of course contrive to teach what will be most for their interest, not so much considering what is true and right, as what is most palatable and pleasing, and will bring them in most profit. Men of this stamp are the meanest and vilest of men: yet such there were even in the Apostolical times: for St. Paul thus complains, in his Epistle to Titus; *There are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, especially they of the circumcision: whose mouths must be stopped, who pervert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.* (Tit. i. 10, 11.) They invented and propagated palatable doctrines, pleasing errors, such as took with the vicious, and brought in gain to the teachers. Those false teachers were Jewish Christians, and taught, among other things, that Israelites, all in general, were secure of their portion in the life to come; a doctrine as pleasing to many, as it was pernicious to their souls.

Another doctrine which they taught, as false as the other, was the necessity of circumcision to Gentiles; and this they did, only to *humour and flatter the Jews, for their own interest, lest they should suffer persecution of the Jews, for the cross of Christ.* (Galat. vi. 12.) Of like sort were the Nicolaitans, or Balaamites, whom St. Peter, St. Jude, and St. John speak of, as *running greedily after the error of Balaam for reward.* (Jude, ii. 2 Pet. ii. 15. Rev. ii. 14.) They taught several doctrines, false and scandalous, but agreeable enough to flesh and blood; and such as, upon that account, brought them in both honour and profit, among the libertines of the age, among the dissolute and profane. Thus has avarice been the mother of heresies, and has brought in many deceivers into the church of Christ: but they have contrived generally to give some plausible turn and colour to their inventions, through their sleight, and cunning craftiness, in order to deceive the hearts of the simple, and to beguile unwary and unstable souls.

3. One motive more I mentioned, namely, voluptuousness, or love of pleasure. As religious restraints set not easy upon flesh and blood, but bear hard upon corrupt nature; so men of corrupt minds will be ever labouring to invent, and publish smooth and softening doctrines, such as may either qualify the strictness of the gospel-rule, or sap the belief of a future reckoning. Many ancient heretics had such views as these in the first broaching of their heresies: but I shall look no lower than the Scripture accounts; that it may appear from thence, that neither any respect even to living Apostles, nor any regard to the attestations of the brightest miracles, can sufficiently deter those who are disposed to set up for heads of a sect, and to disperse and propagate their own crude conceptions. Hymeneus, and Philetus, and Alexander the copper-smith, were men of this perverse stamp, and gave great disturbance to the holy Apostle, St. Paul. (1 Tim. i. 20. 2 Tim. ii. 17.—iv. 14.) They pretended that *the resurrection was already past, overthrowing the faith of some.* (2 Tim. ii. 18.) They explained away the Scripture-doctrine of a real resurrection to quite another sense, and gave out their own false glosses for Scripture truths, as is the manner of deceivers. Their design was

to take off the awe and dread of a future judgment, and thereby to open a door to all licentiousness of life, and dissoluteness of manners. St. Paul therefore reprimanded them sharply, as became his high office; and, by his Apostolical authority, he *delivered them over unto Satan*, that they might take warning for the future, and *learn to blaspheme.* (1 Tim. i. 20.) These instances are sufficient to shew how deceivers arise, and with what views they endeavour to make converts to their respective persuasions, all centering in the love of honour, or riches, or pleasure; or, more briefly, in the love of the world; for, when men desert either the true faith, or sound morals, we may say of them, as St. Paul said of Demas;—*Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.* (2 Tim. iv. 10.) But having done with the deceivers, I come now,

II To consider the case of the deceived, who suffer themselves to be tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine.

They are supposed to be ignorantly, and in a manner blindly, led on by others; otherwise, they would be rather confederates and confidents in managing the deceit, and so would be more deceivers than deceived. Now, as to those who are so ignorantly imposed upon, they are more or less to blame, according as their ignorance is more or less blameable: and that again will be more or less blameable, according as it is more or less affected, or wilful.

There are, I think, three cases which will take in all sorts of men who suffer themselves to be deceived in things of this kind.

The first is, of those who have no opportunity, no moral possibility of informing themselves better. The second is, of those who might inform themselves better, but do not. The third, of those who might also be better informed, but will not: of which in their order.

1. As to the first sort, since they are supposed to lie under invincible ignorance and incapacity, their case is pitiable. Perhaps it may be the case of a poor servant under an over-bearing master, whom he is taught to reverence in all things, and to take his word for a law. Or it may be the case of a raw and ignorant youth while under a bad father: or of

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any plain labouring man in the way of low life, who can neither read nor examine for himself, but must take every thing upon trust from the hand of such superior person or persons as he chances to be listed under. These and the like cases, I refer to simple, unaffected ignorance: and so far as their ignorance or infirmity is really unconquerable; so far are they blameless, or not accountable. If they be like *children tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine*; yet, if they are really children in understanding, and are overborne by others in such a way as is morally irresistible, considering their circumstances; then it seems to be their misfortune to be so imposed upon, rather than their fault, and so is not imputable.

2. A second case is, of those who may inform themselves better, but neglect to do it. I suppose it to be merely neglect in them, not design. Perhaps they have little or no leisure for inquiries: they are taken up with worldly cares and business: they have a very great esteem and value for the man who so misleads them, and they know no better, but swallow every thing he says, without considering; or they are not aware of any ill consequences of the doctrine, see or suspect no harm in it. This, I think, is a true description of the unthinking and careless, who takes up their opinions by chance, and inquire no farther. They are much to blame in this affair; because God has given them the faculty of reason, which ought not to be thus left to lie dormant and useless. Men who can be sharp enough in secular affairs to prevent being imposed upon, may and ought to have some guard upon themselves with respect also to their spiritual concerns. It is not enough to say, they have something else to mind, or that they do not think of it: such negligence betrays a culpable carelessness as to the one thing needful, and a great contempt of God and religion. We ought to think it as much our concern in spiritual things, not to have errors and false doctrines put upon us; as we do in things temporal, not to be imposed upon by false weights instead of true, or false money instead of sterling. So much for those who are merely careless in a matter of this high concernment.

3. There is yet a third sort of men, worse than the former, who suffer them-

selves to be deceived, and might know better, but will not: that is to say, their ignorance is affected and wilful: they love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. These are such as readily run in with *every wind of doctrine* which hits their taste, and chimes in with their favourite inclinations. They admit the doctrine, because they like it; and they easily believe it true, because they would have it so. It is with this kind of men that deceivers prevail most, and make their harvest. False teachers commonly observe and study the several weaknesses and corrupt dispositions of those whom they apply to; and so, by flattering their passions, and humouring their follies, they lead them about where they please, and make a property of them. The persons so deceived, first deceive themselves, being led away and enticed as much by their own lusts, as by the tempter's subtilty. They are very near as deep in guilt, as the deceivers themselves are, because the same corrupt principles are common to both; only there is this difference, that one spreads the false doctrine, the other gladly receives it, and by receiving encourages it, and so is passively instrumental in seducing others, and is but one remove from the more active seducer. Having thus considered the several cases both of deceivers and deceived, it remains now only, in the third and last place,

III. To subjoin some advices proper to prevent our falling in with either.

The best preservative, in this case, is an honest and good heart, well disposed towards truth and godliness, having no by-ends to serve, no favourite lust or passion to indulge. If any man is but willing to know and do God's commandments; he will easily discern, in most cases, whether a doctrine be of God, or whether it be of men. The evidences of the true religion, and of its main doctrines, are so bright and strong, when carefully attended to, that common sense and reason are sufficient to lead us, when there is no bias to mislead us. If we intend well, and sincerely aim at truth, and have no inclination to turn from it, either to the right or left, we shall not miss of it; at least, not in any points of weight or concernment. Retain but this honest and upright disposition of heart, and then, as

you can have no inclination to deceive others, so neither will you be liable to be grossly or dangerously deceived yourselves. Many particular cautions might be given, which I have no room to mention: but he who has once well learnt the general rule before mentioned, will need no other, or will himself find out, as occasion offers, all the rest.

And now to apply very briefly what hath been here said, to our particular case and circumstances. We live in an age of deceivers, and so did the Apostles themselves: and if their authority, even among their own disciples, was not sufficient to keep out false doctrines and dangerous; so neither will any more disputable authority be able to do it now. It is our happiness however, that both the truth, and the whole truth, purged from every gross error or superstition, is here publicly professed and taught, and every one that runs may read it. What has been calmly, wisely, and deliberately settled by excellent men, martyrs here, and now faints with God, let none lightly depart from, lest they justly fall under the censure of the text, of being *like children tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive*. Such deceivers we are to expect, and such we have had lately, more perhaps than ever.

For several years last past, rude and bold attacks have been making against the important doctrines of Christianity, and against all revealed religion: and this is what they are still carrying on with exquisite subtilty and craftiness many ways, and with a great deal of fruitless pains and labour. For, I may have leave to suppose, that no man can in this case be deceived, who has not first a desire to be so, and is not the dupe and bubble to his own lusts and vices. Attempts have been made to persuade us, that private vices are public benefits: who sees not that their lusts dictate what their pens write, and that the very corruption of the heart is come up into the head? Others presume to tell us, that man is no free agent, and has no liberty of will; from whence it would immediately follow, that there is no virtue nor vice, no future reckoning. Such dogmatizers as these, only betray their own guilty fears, and, if there be any such thing, have pre-

judged themselves beforehand to everlasting damnation. Others, lastly, have run riot upon the miracles of our blessed Lord, and have thrown out more blasphemies in a few months time, than hath ever been known in any Christian country, in a course of ages. Can any serious person be deceived by these things, which are frightful and hideous enough, almost to chill his blood, or to make it run backward in his veins?

It would be affronting a Christian audience, to exhort them not to be carried about with any such wind of doctrines as have been taught by these blasphemers. The cunning serpent, in these instances, seems to have gone beyond himself, and to have forgot his wonted subtilty. The imposition is too gross, and the language too coarse, to fetch in converts. All it can do, is, to make those worse who were always bad, to render them perhaps ten times more the children of hell than they were before.

As to men of any good sense or sobriety, I presume, such attempts will only fill them with horror and astonishment, and stir up their pious zeal for God and religion. May all attacks upon our most holy faith, or against any branch of it, have no other effect: and may our blessed Lord God, who alone can bring good out of evil, direct and over-rule all things for the good of his church, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SERMON XII.

The History and Character of Balaam.

NUMB. XXII. 10, 11, 13.

And Balaam said unto God, Balak the son of Zippor, King of Moab, hath sent unto me, saying, Behold, there is a people come out of Egypt, which covereth the face of the earth: Come now, curse me them; peradventure I shall be able to overcome them, and drive them out. And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them, thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed.

THE story of Balaam fills up three whole chapters in this book of Numbers; and it is frequently referred to in several other places, both of the Old and New Testament. Seeing then that it makes so considerable a figure in the

the sacred history, (though it comes in but occasionally) I have thought it may well deserve a distinct consideration; and do therefore choose it for the subject of our present meditations.

The Israelites, in their passage through the wilderness, were to march through the land of the Moabites, a people descended of Lot, and over whom Balak was king at that time. The Moabites, Ammonites, and Midianites, near neighbours, were all alarmed at the march of the Israelites, and were afraid of them; knowing what great things God had so lately done for them; and that neither Sihon king of the Amorites, nor Og the king of Basan, had been able to stand before them. The Israelites had entirely routed and ruined those two potent princes, taking possession of their lands: and they had done it with such dispatch, and in so surprising a manner, that the nations round about had reason to suspect that there was something very extraordinary and supernatural in it. It seems to have been owing to some such apprehension as this, that none of them durst oppose the Hebrews, without endeavouring first to engage Heaven on their side, which they hoped to do by the help of enchantments.

There was a famous Magician, or Prophet, of that time, whose name was Balaam, mightily celebrated through all the East: him they resolved to court with high promises, and, if possible, to bribe him over to their interest in this exigency. The notion they had of him was, that he was so divine a man, so highly favoured by Heaven, that he could turn the fate of war which way he pleased, by his benedictions and imprecations: for thus said Balak in his message to him: *I wot that he whom thou blessest, is blessed; and he whom thou cursest, is cursed.* (Numb. xxii. 6.) The Midianites and Moabites were both of them full of the same persuasion, as we learn from this chapter: and we find from other places of Scripture (Deut. xxiii. 3, 4.), that the Ammonites joined with them in the design of sending to Balaam. Dispatches were ordered to him, desiring him to come and take a survey of the camp of Israel, and to curse them in solemn form, in order to their destruction.

It may look a little strange, that they should trust so little to their own Gods at

home, and should send as far as Mesopotamia, for a Prophet to assist them. Certainly, Balaam's reputation must have run very high; or there must have been some very peculiar reason for that uncommon method of proceeding. Perhaps they imagined, that the Gods of their own country were not able to defend them against the God of Israel; having so lately seen what the Israelites had done to the Amorites their neighbours: or, they might fancy that Balaam had an interest with all kinds of gods, and might engage them all to come in to their assistance: or rather, I incline to think that they knew Balaam to be a prophet of the same God which the Israelites worshipped; and that therefore by his means they hoped to draw off the God of Israel (whom they were so much afraid of) from assisting the Israelites, and to incline him to favour the Moabites, and those who were joined with them.

The learned are not perfectly agreed as to Balaam's character, whether to call him a Magician, or a Prophet: but it is very evident that he was well acquainted with the name of the God of Israel, and that he applied himself to him, and to him only in that affair. For, when the elders of Moab and Midian came first to him, he desired them to lodge with him that night, promising them to bring them word in the morning, what *the Lord* (that is, what Jehovah the God of Israel) should say to him, in relation to their errand (Numb. xxii. 8.): which accordingly he did; and the answer he brought was what Jehovah the God of Israel had really put into his mouth. This circumstance plainly shews that he had been used to consult the true God in former times: for otherwise, he could never have pretended now to promise beforehand to bring an answer from him, or to know for certain that it was his.

There is no absurdity in supposing that God might have some prophets (abroad in the Heathen world) who were not of Israel. Job was undoubtedly such an one; and why might not Balaam be another? It is the more likely, because, from the time of Abraham, God had spread the knowledge of himself about the idolatrous world; and all Abraham's posterity were originally circumcised, and became worshippers of the true God; though, in process of time, they revolted
and

and fell into idolatry. The Moabites and Ammonites, whom we are now speaking of, were of distinct consideration from the rest of the Heathen world, being the descendants of righteous Lot, who was of the same religion with Abraham. The Midianites too, of whom most probably Balaam was, were the posterity of Abraham, by Keturah; and who, therefore, certainly had, for some time, the knowledge of the true God amongst them, which makes it the more probable that God might plant some Prophets amongst them in those early days, to preserve that true religion and worship which they had received from their progenitors.

Upon the whole, then, I take the liberty to conclude, that Balaam was really a Prophet; and so he is called by St. Peter. (2 Pet. ii. 16.) And as he had an interest and correspondence with the true God, so the meaning of the Moabites really was, that he should come and endeavour to draw off the God of Israel from assisting the Hebrews. He did make the attempt (being hired and bribed so to do) and without effect. Accordingly it is observed in Deuteronomy, that the *Lord would not hearken unto Balaam.* (Deut. xxiii. 5.) And God himself says, by the mouth of Joshua, to the same purpose, *Balak sent and called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you, but I would not hearken unto Balaam, therefore he blessed you still.* (Josh. xxiv. 10.) These considerations shew that Balaam had addressed himself to the God of Israel, in hopes to have his licence and authority for cursing the Israelites. From whence we may reasonably infer, that Balaam had been his Prophet some time before, and that, in confidence of such his high relation to God, he presumed to consult him once and again upon that occasion. Having thus far cleared our way, we may now proceed,

I. To consider more distinctly the history of Balaam, as laid down in Scripture.

II. To make some reflections upon it.

I. The first mention which we have of this man is in this chapter of the book of Numbers. The occasion of his being concerned with the Children of Israel has been already intimated. Next, let us observe how he behaved himself upon that occasion, what the effect was, and what became of him in the end.

To do him justice, he behaved himself

extremely well when the message was first brought him from king Balak. He consulted God upon the matter laid before him, made a faithful report of the errand which the ambassadors came upon, received God's answer, and submitted to it; acquainting the messengers that God would not give him leave to curse that people; no, nor so much as to go along with the ambassadors. Thus far he carried himself well and wisely, like an honest, pious, upright man. But afterwards came other messengers, more in number, and greater in dignity than the former: and they pressed him vehemently to comply with Balak's request; promising him rich presents, and honourable preferments, in a word, any thing, or every thing which he could ask or desire. To this again he made answer, that, *if Balak would give him his house full of silver and gold, yet he could not go beyond the word of the Lord his God.* (Numb. xxii. 18.) This was well said, and was the plain truth. And here by the way observe, that Balaam, in these words, professes his attachment to the Lord Jehovah, as his God; which is a further confirmation of what I before hinted, that he was really a prophet of the true God.

But to proceed: After this, whether prevailed upon by importunity, or softened too much by the charms of honour and riches (which dazzled his eyes) the good man began to stagger; and he yielded so far as to consult God again upon the same thing, though he had before had an absolute and peremptory denial. This was his first false step; for it was tempting God, and making too free with the Divine Majesty, forgetting both his duty and distance. God then gave the man leave to go with the princes; but in such a manner, as might have made him sensible that it had been better if he had not asked it; and that his going would be to no purpose, since he should still be restrained from cursing the people; which was what he went for, and was the sole end and design of the princes who came to call him. Balaam however, having already set his heart too much upon the bribes, readily accepted of the concession made him; and that very morning he set out on his journey with the princes of Moab. God was angry with him for being so forward in

in this matter, which he might more wisely have declined, though leave was given him: and besides, Balaam conceived hopes that he might at length have permission to curse the Children of Israel: otherwise it was a wild undertaking to pretend to go at all. God seeing the temper of the man, and what he had in his heart, sent an angel to stop him in the way, and to deter him effectually from his purpose. *He loved the wages of unrighteousness*, as St. Peter observes, *and was rebuked for his iniquity; the dumb ass speaking with man's voice, forbade the madness of the prophet.* (2 Pet. ii. 16.) The history of that prodigy is related at large in the book of Numbers, and is a matter well known.

Some have been of opinion (with Maimonides the famous Jew) that the whole story of Balaam and the ass was a vision only, or a dream, and transacted merely in idea. But there is nothing in the text of Moses to countenance such a persuasion; nor are the reasons, suggested for this opinion, of weight sufficient to persuade us to lay aside the plain literal construction.

It is with better colour that others, admitting the literal construction, have further thought that the whole affair was symbolical, and might admit of a mystical, as well as a literal interpretation; though this also is no more than conjecture. But they who take this way, suppose that the beast which the Prophet rode upon, might be an emblem of Balaam spurred on by Balak his master. The ass saw the danger by the way, and made some efforts to avoid it, while the rider was perfectly blind; and in like manner the Prophet had seen that God was against the design, and made some efforts to turn aside from it; but was still vehemently pressed on, and pushed forwards by king Balak. I forbear to mention other resembling circumstances, which have afforded reason for supposing that the whole was emblematical, and intended for Balaam's instruction, that he might see his folly and retreat in time.

But he went on; and God permitted him now to proceed (according to his own devices) to reap the fruits of his ambition and avarice; only taking care all the time that he should not drop the least curse upon the Israelites; but should speak as directed by God himself, and

deliver nothing but blessings. The Prophet accordingly, after several fruitless essays to prevail with God to let him curse the people, was still constantly withheld from doing it; and instead of cursing them, he altogether blessed them three times; and at length concluded, prophesying of the downfall of the Moabites, and foretelling many and prodigious successes of the people of Israel. Thus was king Balak's design utterly frustrated: and instead of rewarding the prophet, he was bitterly incensed against him. And now Balaam, being reduced to these straits, began to perceive how foolish an errand he had come upon, and how little he had gained by the expedition. However, having failed in one way, he hoped now to make Balak some amends in another: and, as God had now given the man up to his own mad counsels, he next entered into as wicked and impious a design as could well be imagined. He advised the Moabites to think of some means of drawing the Israelites into some heinous offence against their God; assuring them, that there was no possible way of getting an advantage over Israel, unless they could be first drawn into sin, that so a breach might be made between God and them. This was a kind of Machiavilian policy, shrewd and deep laid, but cursed and diabolical. It had not the effect which Balaam aimed at in it (God so far defeating his counsels), but the event was, the seducing great numbers of Israelites into whoredom first, and then into idolatry; and it ended in the destruction of 24000 of God's people.

This wickedness of Balaam is particularly taken notice of by St. John, in the Revelations; who, speaking to the church of Pergamus in the name of Christ, says: *I have a few things against thee, because thou hast here them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the Children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.* (Rev. ii. 14.) St. Peter also alludes to the same thing; speaking of some persons, who, as he says, *had forsaken the right way, and were gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.* (2 Pet. ii. 15.) St. Peter calls him son of Beor. In the Old Testament he is called son of Beor: but

Beor

Beor and Bofor are both the same name in the original, only differently pronounced; and perhaps this may be one instance among others wherein St. Peter followed a Galilean pronunciation: but that by the way only. I should take notice, that St. Jude also alludes to the same thing with what St. Peter and St. John refer to; rebuking some persons for *running greedily after the error of Balaam for reward*. (Jude, ver. 11.) The persons there pointed to, were a wretched sect of false teachers which started up in the very infancy of the Christian church. They held it lawful to follow carnal lusts, to commit fornication, adultery, incest, and other impurities. This palatable doctrine suited the corrupt taste of the voluptuous, and brought the teachers in much applause, and many a fair present from their carnal hearers. And now, because their doctrine was very like Balaam's, and the principal motive to it in the teachers was avarice, and a desire of flattering and pleasing others in their lusts; therefore those teachers were compared to Balaam, and their doctrine to his. Their Hebrew name also was Balaamites, as their Greek name was Nicolaitans; both which signify the same thing, viz. lords, or leaders of the people. And thus the name of Balaam revived, as it were, in the first ages of the Gospel, but much to his dishonour, to make his memory the more odious and detestable to latest posterity. But I return to the history where I left off.

After Balaam, by his cursed counsels, had led Israel into a snare, and God had taken severe vengeance of his own people for being so weakly misled; he then gave orders to Moses and the Israelites to march against the Midianites, and smite them, in revenge for the wiles which, by the advice of Balaam, they had practised, and thereby beguiled Israel. Accordingly, they went out, and made a dreadful slaughter of the Midianites, destroying their country, and dividing the spoil. And here it was that Balaam at length reaped the wages of his iniquity, being slain among the rest with the edge of the sword. (Numb. xxxi. 8. Jos. xiii. 22.) Such was the end of that unhappy man; once a prophet, and, as it seems, highly in favour with Almighty God; but beguiled with the charms of ambition and covetousness, falling off by little and little (as

God withdrew his grace, which he had made an ill use of), till at length he came up to the highest pitch of wickedness; becoming a seducer, and setting himself at the head of the rebellion against God, doing infinite mischief by his diabolical counsels; and instructing princes in such arts of cursed policy, as ought to render his name infamous to all posterity.

I should farther observe, that, for a standing memorial of God's resentment for what had been done by the Ammonites and Moabites against his people of Israel; he made an order that no Ammonite or Moabite should be permitted to enter into the congregation of the Lord, till after the tenth generation, because of what they had done in the matter of Balaam. The words of the law are: *An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord, even to the tenth generation—Because they met you not with bread and water in the way, when you came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam, the son of Beor, of Pe-thor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee* (Deut. xxiii. 3, 4.). The meaning of which law is, that, though an Ammonite, or a Moabite, should become a convert to the Jewish religion, and conform to their law and ceremonies in every respect, and become a complete member of the Jewish church; yet he should not have the privileges of marrying with an Israelite, but should be debarred from it, he and his posterity for ten generations; which is interpreted in Nehemiah, to mean *for ever* (Neh. xiii. 1.). Such was the mark set upon the Ammonites and Moabites for their offence in that instance: and Balaam's infamy was perpetuated by the same law, being expressly mentioned in it as the man who had been hired to curse God's people. But enough hath been said of the history of Balaam; pass we on now,

II. To make some reflections upon it; as it may indeed afford us plentiful matter for it.

1. In the first place observe, that there is no time of man's life wherein he may not be tempted, or may not be in danger of falling off from God and goodness; which should be an argument to us for constant care and watchfulness over ourselves. Even those whom God hath favoured in a very particular manner, and with heavenly gifts and graces, are no more secure than others, if they take not proper-

proportionable care. I say nothing of Solomon, or others who might here be mentioned: Balaam is the instance now before us, a prophet of the most high God, and probably advanced in years, since his fame had spread wide and far. His standing was not so firm, but that an unlooked for, and a powerful temptation, shook his steadfastness, and brought him down from the heights he had attained in God's favour, to a most forlorn and wretched condition.

2. Observe, farther, how dangerous a thing it is, so much as to attend, or listen to the charms of wealth and honour; for a gift will sometimes blind the wise, and a bribe will beguile their hearts. Balaam looked too much upon the golden presents, and was too sensibly struck with the sound of honour and preferments; which made him the less consider upon how slippery ground he stood, and how dangerous an affair that was to concern himself in. Put it even in the best light, and imagine that he might have had God's leave to do what Balak desired; yet, would a wise and a good man have been forward to set God to sale, and to make a trade of the favours sent him from above? Elisha would not suffer so much as his servant to take a gift of a great man whom he had cured of a leprosy: so unbecoming a thing did he think it to sell and make merchandize of spiritual privileges. Had Balaam been of that temper, he would never have been misled in the shameful manner he was, but would have held fast his integrity to the end.

3. Observe, thirdly, that when God sees men leaning too far to ambitious or covetous desires, and not wise enough to take such gentle hints as might be sufficient to call them back; he then leaves them to pursue their own hearts lusts, and lets them follow their own imaginations. When he at first prohibited Balaam from cursing the people, and from going with the messengers, that was indication sufficient. A wise man, after that, would have absolutely refused to treat or parley with any ambassadors whatever upon the same errand. But Balaam had set his heart upon the bribes, and was become warm and eager in the business. So God permitted the foolish man to go on as his inclinations led, and to run his utmost lengths of folly and madness. Since he would not retreat in time, nor know when

he had done enough (though God had given him sufficient intimations), he was at length permitted to proceed in his own way, and to his own destruction.

4. Observe next, how foolish a part a man acts, and how he exposes himself to contempt and scorn, as well as danger, when he takes upon him to follow his own way and humour, and will not have God for his guide. It was a weak thing in Balaam to ask God a second time, after God had abundantly signified his pleasure: and it was still weaker, after he had received a second answer, discouraging him from any thought of cursing the people, for him to go on with the princes of Moab, and to offer himself to Balak, when he could do him no service. But, to shew some good inclination towards serving Balak, he resolved to make very free with Almighty God, though he had carried his irreverent familiarity too far before. He was now come to Balak, and something he must do; though, as to the main thing, which was cursing the people, he knew very well that God had tied up his mouth. However, he makes Balak prepare altars and sacrifices, and he would thereby try again and again, what God would say to him. A dangerous thing thus to tempt, and trifle with the eternal God! Well: the effect was, that, much against his inclination, he was made to bless the people whom he came to curse; which highly offended Balak, and made the prophet ridiculous in the eyes of all there present. Yet this was not sufficient, but the foolish man goes on to tempt God again, and with the same success; till Balak was perfectly enraged against the prophet, and God let them both see, that his will should prevail, and not theirs.

5. Observe, farther, that, when once stubborn and wilful men have run such lengths in opposition to the will of Heaven; God then gives them up to a reprobate mind, and lets them fall from one degree of wickedness to another. So it was in Balaam. He had been provoking God, time after time, by the foolish, irreverent, and conceited part he had been acting: and now God left him to do a great deal worse; to be counsellor to Balak in as wicked policy as hell itself could invent; to seduce the Israelites into fornication, and into the abominable lewdnesses which went along with the feasts and revellings made in honour of Baal-peor. A man who

who could give such counsel as that, must have first shaken off all honour, respect, or reverence for the living God; which indeed appears to have been Balaam's case in the end.

6. One thing more we may observe from his history, which is this; that the spirit of God may sometimes vouchsafe to come upon a very wicked man (so far as concerns the extraordinary gifts), without reforming or influencing the same man as to his life and morals, in the way of ordinary operation. These two things are very distinct, and may often be separate; as in Balaam at that time, and in Judas afterwards. Balaam had undoubtedly the gift of prophecy, even while he was doing amiss, and tempting Almighty God. For *the spirit of God came upon him* (Numb. xxiv. 2.), and made use of his organs in the delivering several remarkable prophecies fulfilled in their season: as the rising strength and growing greatness of the Israelites; the fall of Moab, and of Edom, which was to be effected in the time of King David; the destruction of Amalek, which came to pass somewhat sooner, in King Saul's time; the over-

throw also of the Kenites by the hand of the Assyrians; and, what is more than all, the overthrow of the Assyrian conquerors themselves by the hands of the Chittim, that is, of the Macedonians; which was executed under the conduct of Alexander the Great. These were great and valuable prophecies, and most of them, besides their more immediate reference, had a further view to the coming of Christ: and hence it is that this history of Balaam deserved the more especial notice, and is made to fill up so many chapters in Moses. But when we find such considerable prophecies delivered by the mouth of an ungodly man; give God the glory, and let the shame rest where it ought. The prophecies are of standing use in the church; but the prophet will be no gainer by them: our Lord himself has fully interpreted this case, in the words following: *Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name; and in thy name cast out devils; and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity.* (Matt. vii. 22, 23.)

SECTION XIII.

FROM THE

SERMONS of EDWARD STONE, M. A.

Formerly FELLOW of WADHAM COLLEGE, OXFORD.

SERMON I.

No Charity without real Benevolence.

1 COR. 13. 3.

Though I give all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

WHERE there is charity, there is a benevolent temper, a real sympathy with the afflicted, and bowels of compassion for the distressed; and he, who hath no such temper or feeling, how large soever his donations may be, or whatever appearances he may put on, hath no charity. On the other hand, he, who hath such a disposition or sympathy, though he hath not so much as the widow's mite to give, is as charitable as if he had given the whole world: charity is according to the largeness of men's hearts, and not of their estates.

The charity, which acts by fits and starts, and is sometimes partial and sometimes prejudicial, and can suffer the passions of envy, revenge, or malice, to get the ascendant over it, is a spurious and adulterated charity; for these are inconsistent with the genuine properties of this virtue, which is universal benevolence, and extends to all our fellow-creatures, of whatever country, religion, or profession they may be; it must be equal and uniform, flowing with an uninterrupted course, and having no respect to persons: our Saviour gave us a specimen of this virtue, in the behaviour of the Samaritan to the person, who, travelling from Jericho to Jordan, fell among thieves, was stripped, wounded, and left half dead: this Samaritan did not stay to inquire of what nation, people, or religion he was;

but as this miserable object bore a human form, he could not help bearing a human heart towards him; he was in fact his neighbour; because he did all neighbourly offices by him; and this is the true character of charity, which Christ commands us to bear towards all the sons of men.

A third inference that offers itself to us, from the words of my text, is the superlative excellency of charity; and since it is the principal design of the Apostle in this chapter, to raise in us the highest sense of this duty, I will enlarge upon the subject, and recommend the practice of this virtue, by shewing you what rank it bears among all moral and Christian accomplishments, and in what manner it stands distinguished, both by natural and revealed religion.

As man is the most social of all beings, so benevolence is the principal characteristic of his nature: to say that we are rational animals, is not giving above half the description of us; humanity is an essential part of our constitution; and we had better been without reason, than without humane affections; for by losing that, we only lose our nature; but without these, we invert it; we induce a savage temper, and degenerate into brutes and monsters.

Charity, likewise, is our noblest qualification, as it is the most universal practical principle; it bears a part in every duty; it is concerned, almost in every circumstance of life; and it should direct our whole conduct, in whatever capacity we act, whether as a member of a family, a relation, friend, neighbour, fellow-citizen, or fellow-creature: society, indeed, may subsist by justice, which will terminate disputes, and prevent the external
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acts of enmity; but charity will make us sincere and cordial friends; it is the bond which unites our minds, and links our hearts to one another; justice corrects the evils, charity dispenses the blessings of society.

There is no torment, saith St. John, in love; it is full of complacency and good humour; and there is no satisfaction equal to the consciousness of deserving well of all: he who looks upon all mankind as his family and relations, and seeks to promote their welfare, can have no subject of fear or discontent; he hath the whole world to be happy out of, every man he meets with is his friend, and every object gladdens in his sight.

Hence, charity, considered as a moral virtue, appears to be one of our noblest accomplishments; but, its excellency will shine forth with brighter lustre, from the light which revealed religion casts upon it; not only in this chapter, but through all the sacred writings, it is characterized as the queen of all Christian graces and perfections.

It is described, both in an absolute and a relative sense; by its intrinsic goodness, and by its superior excellency to other qualifications.

This virtue, saith the Apostle, never faileth; the gifts of prophecy, of tongues, and of knowledge, were only temporary; they were to cease; but charity is a perennial accomplishment; it will never be unseasonable nor unfashionable; it is coeval with human nature, and will continue as long as man and society exist.

As goodness is the most amiable of the divine attributes; and as God hath created us after his own image, by distinguishing us from all others, for benevolent beings, and endowing us with larger capacities for doing good: on what virtue could our gracious Creator lay a greater stress, than on this, by which we heighten our resemblance to him, and raise the human to a godlike nature? For these reasons, likewise, it is easy to suppose, that the blessed Author of our religion hath made it the mark by which his disciples are to be distinguished; *By this, says he, shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another*; let the exhibition of this virtue in your practice be the declaration of the religion in your hearts; and extort this confession from

all mankind—There goes a disciple of Jesus Christ, you may know him by his extraordinary love of charity. As our Lord himself then hath instituted this, as the principal qualification of a Christian, it is highly incumbent upon us, to distinguish ourselves by it.

And, again, we read that the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness; all which are the peculiar properties of this virtue.

Again, when we consider what is said of charity in a comparative sense, it appears to be, not only the most considerable of any qualifications, but to outweigh them altogether: alone, it will atone for many defects in other parts of our duty; but all other qualifications will not compensate for any deficiencies in this.

The ceremonial and instituted parts of religion, are means to an end; they cannot stand by themselves; *I will have mercy, and not sacrifice*, saith the Lord. Moral virtues may recommend themselves; they can go no farther; but charity, we are told, will cover a multitude of sins; it is so acceptable in the sight of God, that where he finds it, he will excuse many offences for its sake.

Upon whatever motive men may give all their goods to feed the poor, whether it be for power, or applause, or for an atonement for their sins, or for the sake of laying up treasures in heaven, or however near an approach they may make to this virtue, by practising it, even to one half of mankind, yet, if they are wanting in it to the other, it will avail them nought.

Though we should be inspired with supernatural knowledge, and should understand all mysteries, and all prophecies; and though we should have the gift of tongues, and with the eloquence of angels could communicate this knowledge, and explain these mysteries, yet, if we have not charity, we are nothing; we are only mere shew and noise, like sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

Our belief in God is not well founded, if it be not built upon this virtue: *How can a man, saith St. John, love God, whom he hath not seen, if he love not his brother, whom he hath seen?*

And our belief in Christ will be ineffectual, if it be without charity. St. Paul draws

draws a contrast between faith, hope, and charity, and expressly asserts, that of them, the greatest is charity; it is a nobler accomplishment, and a greater recommendation to the Almighty: nay, it is not only the greatest of the three Christian graces, but, supposing even faith to be so strong as to remove mountains, yet it would be nothing in comparison with charity. In the infancy of Christianity, when our religion was supported by miracles, faith was either a supernatural gift, or when it arose to such a degree, it was accompanied with supernatural powers; which ever it was, the Apostle not only asserts, that it might then be without charity, but he assures us, that if it was without charity, it would be insignificant and useless; that is, though we believed all the prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the Messiah, to be completed in Jesus Christ; and all his miracles recorded in the new; and though we were so firmly persuaded that he was the Saviour and Redeemer of the world, as to be ready to give our bodies to be burned, in testimony of it, and for that reason, had been endowed with supernatural power; yet, if we had not charity, the principal qualification and characteristic of a Christian, all this strong faith would profit us nothing.

Lastly: As our Saviour hath made this virtue the principal qualification of his disciples, so it will be the chief criterion, by which he will try them, when he shall come to judgment. Many, it is said, will then plead, that they have prophesied in the name of Christ, and by his name have cast out devils, and have done many wonderful works; but these are not the tests by which they will be tried. It is not said, that men will be asked, what faith they had in Christ? How many proselytes they have made? Or, how zealous they have been in propagating, or defending his religion? Should these be the topics of inquiry, the publication of them is purposely omitted, to shew what stress will be laid upon works of charity; and, that all other qualifications are not worth mentioning, in comparison with it; it is only revealed, that, at the last great day of accounts, when we shall be summoned to appear before the just Judge of heaven and earth, who will pass an irreverfible sentence upon us, according to what we have done in this life; we shall then be

interrogated, what offices of charity we have done? Have we fed the hungry? Have we clothed the naked, visited the sick, or been hospitable to strangers? And, if these have been so universal, that we have done them to the least of our fellow-creatures, or of the brethren of our Lord, he will take it as done to himself, and will reward our charity with eternal life.

The last inference that I shall make is, that, if there be no merit in a man's sacrificing his life for his religion, when it is done without charity, there must be a great demerit in uncharitable zeal, which, for religion's sake, destroys the lives of other men: *Though I give my body to be burned,* says the Apostle, *and have not charity;* the supposition is purely negative; here is only a bare defect of this virtue supposed; the temper may be wholly indifferent, or there may be no disaffection or hatred in it; yet, in this bare absence of charity, or indifferent state of mind, we are assured, that a spirit to suffer martyrdom, or to lay down our lives for religion, will profit us nothing: what shall we say, then, of a persecuting sanguinary spirit, the very reverse of charity? If the want of this virtue precludes all favours, the acting contrary to it, must incur the highest penalties; and they certainly will be the farthest from being admitted into the kingdom of heaven, who not only come without this wedding garment required of them, but in a habit directly contrary to it: and he will have judgment without mercy, who hath shewn himself unmerciful.

To conclude: From the whole of what hath been said upon this subject, let us learn, not to affect any ostentatious shew of this virtue; or to build our thoughts of it, upon the reports of the multitude; but since we may know ourselves best from ourselves, let us look into our own breasts, and examine the principles we are acting upon: let us cultivate an humane and generous temper; let the heart go before the hand; and let the feelings of another's distresses be the motives to our redressing them; that they may bear witness to our charity, and God, who is greater than all, may confirm their testimony.

As universal benevolence is the most excellent moral endowment, and the principal Christian perfection, let us give it the chief place in our affections, and make it the end of all our attainments.

Charity, for ought we know, may be accepted without faith; charity supporteth this hope; but we are expressly told, that faith without charity will profit nothing. Let us therefore make charity the object of our zeal: let us be emulous in good works; let us provoke one another to acts of brotherly kindness; let our zeal and our charity act upon each other; let us be zealously charitable, and charitably zealous. As universal benevolence is the substance of our religion, if our faith be void of it, we believe we know not what; and are zealous for promoting a religion in others, which we want in ourselves; and surely he can by no means deserve to name the name of Christ, however strong his faith may be, if his Christianity detracts ought from his humanity. Is it not absurd, to suppose a person to be the less a man, for being the more a Christian? And what greater perversion can there be of our religion, which qualifies us for the company of angels, than to be made an occasion for disqualifying us for human society?

Love is the characteristic of our religion, and the professors of it are to distinguish themselves by it; if they have not this mark, they may be the vassals of ambition or avarice; they may be slaves to prejudice and passion; or they may be blind bigots in superstition or enthusiasm; but they cannot be the servants of God, or the disciples of Jesus Christ. He that professeth Christianity, professeth a religion of patience, meekness, and benevolence; he undertakes to free his heart from all envy, revenge, and malice; and hath made a solemn vow, that he will be of a peaceable temper; will love his neighbour as himself, and be in charity with all men; and if he fails in these things, he is a scandal to his religion; and whatever his profession may be, his principles and his practices are anti-christian. Consider, how inconsistent it is to enforce the doctrines of love, with the spirit of hatred; or to be zealous for supporting the religion of charity, by cruelty and persecution: he that is angry with his brother for any difference of opinion, is mostly to blame for losing his own temper; and by the very means that he is using to restore him to the faith, he is throwing himself the farther from it. The unity of the church is best preserved, by unity of affection; and uncharitable-

ness is the worst heresy. Let our faith then work by love; and if we cannot be of one opinion, yet let us be of one heart; let us shew, by our gentleness, forbearance, and forgiveness, what spirit we breathe, and whose disciples we are. May Christianity ever convey to us the idea of love; may there be no other contention among its members, but that of outvying each other in benevolence; may we heap coals of fire upon the heads of our enemies, in no other manner than by forgiving and feeding them; and may we set forth the excellency of our religion, and confute the gainsayings of our adversaries, by approving ourselves the most faithful friends to mankind, the most worthy members of society, and the kindest neighbours: so shall we be the sons of God, and make one fold, under one shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord: and may the God of peace, who brought him from the dead, make us perfect in every good work, to do his will; to whom are due all honour, glory, power, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore.

SERMON II.

On Justice.

AMOS, v. 24.

Let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.

THE prophet, in this chapter, is lamenting the deplorable condition of the house of Israel, who had provoked the Lord by their iniquities, and were drawing down the heaviest of his judgments upon their heads.—He earnestly exhorts them to seek the Lord, and to make their peace with him; but this peace, he tells them, was not to be made by sacrifices and offerings, without the sacrifice of a penitent and upright heart; for, if they continued to afflict the just, to take a bribe, and to turn aside the poor in the gate from their right, their application to him would be fruitless: I hate, (saith the Lord by his prophet) I despise your feast-days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies; though ye offer me burnt-offerings, and your meat-offerings, I will not accept them, neither will I regard the peace-offering of your fat

beasts: take thou away from me the noise of thy songs, for I will not hear the melody of thy viols; but hate the evil, and love the good: *let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream, and the Lord God of Hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.*

Nothing can be more obvious, or more remarkable, in these passages, than the preference which is given to justice above sacrifice: they were both enjoined by the Mosaical institution, and apparently founded upon the same authority: this had as large a share in the religious, as that had in the civil polity of the Jews; yet we find justice to be such an indispensable qualification, that the observance of the whole class of rituals, and positive institutions, could not atone for its absence, and was deemed, not only insignificant, but offensive without it.

I do not propose to enter into any particular comparison of these duties, or to raise the one, by depreciating the other; my design is, to enforce the words of my text, which I shall attempt,

First, by inquiring into the real intrinsic merits, and describing the peculiar properties of this virtue;

And, secondly, by inculcating the doctrines, and pointing out the uses resulting from them.

Justice, then, in its utmost latitude, is rendering to every one his due, whatever relation we bear, or in whatever manner we are indebted, to him; and in this sense, it comprehends our whole duty to God, our neighbour, and ourselves, and is composed of the virtues of piety, charity, and temperance.

But justice generally, and in this place particularly, is taken in a more limited sense, as a branch only of social duty; and here it is rendering what is due to every man, when considered in a civil capacity; or, in respect to his property, or his actions, as a member of a community.

And, of this social justice, there are two parts:

One considers men as equals, and is the doing what is honest and fair in their commercial transactions, or private dealings with one another: this is called, reciprocal or commutative justice.

The other part regulates the behaviour of superiors to inferiors, and is both an impartial dispensation of rewards and

punishments, and an equitable decision in civil controverted causes; and this species is generally distinguished by the title of distributive justice.

Both these parts, but principally the latter, are included in the words of my text; and in these senses, therefore, we shall consider them, and proceed to set before you, some of their distinguishing characteristics.

The first excellency of this social virtue which offers itself to us, is, that it is equal, impartial, fit, and right in itself, founded upon truth, or, is rather a part of truth itself; for it hath all the properties of it; it is uniform, consistent, and agreeable to the reason and nature of things; it is also more invariable, than the law of the Medes and Persians; and, like the Son of God, is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. In the holy Scriptures, justice and truth are used promiscuously for one another; for thus it is written, *Thy law is the truth: all thy commandments are truth.* (Psalm cxix. 142. 151.) *Truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter.* (Isaiah, lix. 14.) *None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth,* (ver. 4.) *Execute the judgment of truth in your gates.* (Zechariah, ix. 16.) Again, *The law of truth was in his mouth.* (Malachi, ii. 6.) And, lastly, *To them who do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness.* (Romans, ii. 8.)

Secondly, as justice is truth, so the God of truth is a God of justice. It is natural and essential to him; it is his noblest perfection, or supreme attribute, absolute, uncontrollable; and which, infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, serve and obey: *Justice and judgment, we read, are the habitation of his throne;* that is, it dwelleth with, and is established by them. And again, the Lord is righteous in all his works; justice is the rule of his actions; in the creation of the world, he made all things by its weights and measures; *He weighed the mountains, saith the prophet Isaiah, xl. 12. in its scales, and the hills in its balance:* and it is evident, that Justice is the person whom Solomon introduceth under the name of Wisdom, from the description she gives of herself; *The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways, before his works of old.* (Prov. viii. 22.) When he prepared the heavens, I was there; when he set a compass upon the face of the depth; when he gave to

the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment; and when he appointed the foundations of the earth, then was I by him; as one brought up with him, I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him.

And, as justice accompanied the sovereign Author of nature, in his formation of the world, so it is his constant attendant in the preservation of it; his sceptre is a right sceptre, his administration is equal, and his reign is the reign of incorrupt justice, supported by almighty power and unerring wisdom: the laws of his kingdom were instituted, and are put in execution by it: all the subjects of his universal empire, are equally bound, and equally protected, by them; for God is no respecter of persons; he regardeth not the rich more than the poor, as they are all the works of his hands; and though he can do what he pleases with these works, yet he is pleased to do nothing but what is fair and upright. It would indeed be impertinent in the clay to say to its potter, Why hast thou made me thus? yet he hath fashioned it as truly, and dealt by it as equitably, as if he had been accountable to it; nay, under the Jewish dispensation, when God vouchsafed to speak by the mouths of his prophets, and gave the most explicit declarations of his will, he condescended to a human arbitration; and called upon the house of Israel to judge of his actions, by the same canon he had give them to square their own by; at what time he pleaded his own cause with them, and challenged them to shew, wherein his ways were unequal. (Ezekiel, xviii. 25.)

A third property of this transcendent virtue is, that it is necessary and essential to society, which derives its very being from it, and could not subsist the least part of time without it; fears may drive, or hopes may draw men together; but it is justice which forms them into a society, and keeps them in it, when it is formed; that every member may do and receive justice, is the principle upon which it is built, and upon which it must stand.

In the general society which comprehends all mankind, the rules of doing as we would be done by, of humanity and benevolence (which result from its very constitution, and by which it is supported, and must continue to exist) are the institutes of natural justice; every distinct

civil community, is a subdivision under this greater, subordinate and subservient to it; and all the various forms of government, are only collateral assistances, or artificial improvements of this universal natural society; they are all established upon the same principles, and calculated for the firmer union of their respective members, and rendering them more worthy citizens of the world: and all local political statutes, or municipal laws, are nothing more than explanations, and promulgations of parts of the general institutes of justice, adapted to particular seasons, places, and circumstances, with additional enforcements for the observance of them; and whatever human ordinances do not coincide with and strengthen these, are useless and troublesome; and what interfere with, or contradict them, are in themselves null and void.

In like manner, as every civil polity is founded upon, and derives the sanction of its laws from public and distributive justice, so it is no less beholden for its welfare and prosperity to private and commutative justice; which is the very life of commerce, and creates that trust and confidence among mankind, without which, there could be no exchange of the fruits of their labours, nor any free communication of the goods of life: common wants are redressed, and mutual assistances reached out, by its impartial hand: it is the sole arbiter of disputes, and preserver of peace, by amicably terminating differences between men, and reconciling their several interests; and, in general, it is that powerful cement, which binds every part of a society together, and renders it one compact building, whose strength is in exact proportion to the justice that is spread in it; if it runs through the whole, and filleth every joint, then the house is what Jerusalem was, at unity in itself, indissoluble within, and impregnable from without; its walls are salvation, and its gates praise.

Fourthly, The importance and necessity of this virtue, may also be inferred, from the gracious provision which our omniscient Creator hath thought fit to make for the practice of it.

As he designed us for a social state, so he hath made all the preparations, and furnished us with all the qualifications, both external and internal, proper for it; he hath formed reciprocal dependencies, and

and made a communion of our powers absolutely necessary for our welfare; he hath also endowed us with understanding to discern these dependencies, and imprinted the principles of justice on our minds, in such large characters, that he who runs, may read them; the wayfaring man, though a fool, cannot err therein; every one knows what it is to be honest and true in his dealings; Providence hath made it the common sense of mankind, and all, not only acknowledge and appeal to it, as to a well known rule, but their conviction is accompanied with a sense of an obligation; they feel it to be their duty, and their consciences prompt their observance, and upbraid them for their neglect of it.

But farther, as justice is the very soul of society, it hath been judged necessary, for the more effectual security of this vital principle, to reinforce this knowledge and this sense of duty, with a strong affection for it; that by mixing a kind of necessity with liberty in our constitution, we might be so far compelled to the exercise of this virtue, as is requisite for preserving the being of society, and be entrusted with no more power, than of rendering ourselves more or less happy, by our greater or less use of it: the love of justice, therefore, is a natural passion implanted in us by Divine Providence, through which we are powerfully drawn towards it, and must offer violence to ourselves, to turn from it; hence, it hath that majesty stamp upon it, as to command universal respect; all mankind are prepossessed in its favour, and, whatever men may be in themselves, they cannot help esteeming it in another; truth is strong, and will prevail; it is strong in itself, and it is strong in the hearts of the people; the stream of their affections always sets in with it, and with whatever force it may for a time be obstructed, like the power of mighty waters, it will at length break through, and carry all opposition before it.

Again, as the dignity and extensive influence of this virtue calls for every recommendation, let us now take a view of it in a different light, and see how its picture will be heightened, by setting its opposite quality, as a foil, by it.

Injustice, then, is false and dark; it hath an inherent natural turpitude, and is odious in itself, and offensive to the De-

ity, *who is of purer eyes, than to behold iniquity.* (Hab. i. 13.) *He hath no pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him: the foolish shall not stand in his sight; he hateth all the workers of iniquity.* (Psalm v. 4, 5.) Moreover, as justice is the cement, so injustice is the dissolution of society; where it enters, a debility and relaxation necessarily ensue; as it increases, the strength of the edifice decreases, till, at length, all the connections are entirely broken, and the parts are not only disjoined, but acquire a repulsive quality, and start and fly from one another.

And farther, if we wanted a clearer demonstration of injustice being the bane of society, we might borrow arguments from the professors of iniquity, who furnish us with weapons against themselves: for this very principle which unites their intentions against mankind, cannot unite their affections to one another; and should these sons of rapine pursue their scheme to its utmost latitude, and be uniformly unjust through their whole conduct, every one's hand would be lifted up against his brother, and his brother's against him; and the house of iniquity, being thus totally distracted within itself, must inevitably fall: when, therefore, they enter into a confederacy among themselves, for the more successful practice of injustice, they are obliged to act out of character, to desert their own profession, and find it absolutely necessary to call in justice to their assistance, and observe some rules of honesty and honour among themselves, to hold them together, and form the bands of iniquity; and manifold experience hath abundantly proved, that their gangs are never more effectually broken, than when they are induced from the motive of lucre or self-preservation, to act upon their own principles, by informing against and betraying their companions: how little trust, then, can they repose in one another, whose very trade is to deceive? And how unnatural must all those schemes be, which are inconsistent with, and subversive of themselves? And, in what a desperate situation are the projectors placed, who are compelled to act against the bent of their own minds, for carrying them into execution; and whilst they are drawn together by their common interests, are repelled from one another by their common principles?

But on the other hand, with what powerful recommendation doth that virtue come, when the practice of its most inveterate enemies bears such a testimony to it? What mighty influence likewise must it have, when it reaches even to those who are farthest removed from it? And, if this forced and partial application of it be so useful and necessary, even to its foes, how infinitely beneficial must it be to those real friends, who devote themselves entirely to its service, and direct their whole conduct by it?

But, to finish this contrast:—There is also an innate aversion in the human breast to injustice; we are ashamed of it in ourselves, and loathe it in our neighbour; nothing renders a person more contemptible in the eyes of the world, than iniquity; and where nature operates freely, men cannot help being affected at the relation of violences and oppressions, however distant from them in time or place, and moved with indignation against the oppressors.

But this leads me to my next general head, which was to inculcate the doctrines, and point out the uses resulting from this subject.

And, first, Since justice is right and fit in itself, and agreeable to the nature and reason of things, it must be intrinsically and essentially good, and merit universal regard and esteem; and, as it renders to every one his due, it ought in return to have its due, and be gratefully received by all. There is also a beauty in uniformity and consistency; and if truth in general be venerable, how sacred should that part be held, which, in an especial manner, concerns us and our welfare?

Again, 2dly, As the noblest conceptions we can form of the Deity, are chiefly drawn from his justice; as he, with this attribute alone, would appear most excellent, but without it, would seem monstrous in some respects, and defective in all; the idea therefore of a supreme Being should always convey to us the sense of infinite justice: and, how glorious must this virtue be, which sets a lustre upon, and perfects all his other attributes; when Omnipotency, through its direction, becomes awful, but not dreadful; when mercy, being tempered with it, excites hopes, but not presumption; and when knowledge, considered as its attendant, is extensively beneficial, and superlatively amiable? and what inexpressible

satisfaction must it give to all the subjects of his universal empire, to find this divine accomplishment, to be the darling object of the King of Kings? Hence, they both love and fear him, and his service is perfect freedom: faith, in this sovereign attribute, is the source of genuine piety; when we are firmly persuaded, that what he commands us to do is most right, and what he appoints us to suffer, is absolutely best for us, then we are all obedience and resignation: we make his will our own, and whatever difficulties or distresses we meet with, they appear in the mirror of this faith to be benefits; and through an implicit trust in his justice, we receive them with complacency.

But, if such an ample confidence be placed, through the means of this unerring power, in the Deity, a proportionable degree of credit will be given to every other possessor of it: and if it be the brightest diadem in the crown of Heaven, with what radiance must it shine in our breasts? It would there perfect every endowment; and by making it preside over our affections, and giving it the lead to the understanding, and all the powers of the mind, we should heighten our resemblance to our Creator, and exalt the human to a godlike nature.

But, thirdly, As justice is the bond, and injustice the dissolution of society; it is the first and principal duty of the most social of all beings, to pursue the one and avoid the other. Injustice is infamous in itself, and odious in the sight of mankind; we should therefore flee from it, as from the face of a serpent, to which we have a natural antipathy, and whose bite is mortal: and as nothing can be expected from open or public villany, but shame and confusion of face, let no man flatter himself that he can make any advantage of covert wrong: how can one kind of iniquity be mended by another that is worse? Can hypocrisy give what it hath not? Or, how can good result from the composition of two evils? To be foul within and fair without, to hide a corrupt heart under a sound form, is such an arduous task, that the most artful dissembler cannot long prevent a discovery; but however arduous the task may be, yet the sons of iniquity find it impossible to succeed without attempting it, and at length, to their sorrow, they find it impossible to succeed with it. Dissimulation would be sincere

sincere and inconsistent with itself, if, with the shew of deceiving others, it did not turn its cheat upon its followers; let us therefore take care how we lay any stress upon that vice, which destroys all confidence in one another, and is like the sharp pointed staff, mentioned by the prophet, on which, if a man lean, it will go into his hand and pierce it.

But farther, since justice is essential to society, and men can no more live as social beings without it, than they can breathe without air; should they not esteem it as precious as their lives? Both their interest and their duty call upon them to shew the highest regard to it; and in whatever circumstances they are placed, or in whatever capacity they are acting, they should make it their constant companion and their guide.

If they be considered merely as individuals abstracted from society, even in this partial view, it will appear a most desirable accomplishment; since it hath pleased the Author of all righteousness to implant in us a love of justice, the cherishing and improving of it, is following the direction of nature, or a concurrence with the will of God; it is likewise strengthening that affection, which will balance all the rest, and establish a general equanimity and peace of mind. Or,

If we be considered as members of a family, or in respect only to our nearest relations, justice is as necessary in the least as the largest societies; nay, it may bind the faster for having the fewer subjects to enclose; it is therefore the composer of domestic harmony, and bringeth men to be of one mind in an house: and if it be a joyful thing to dwell together in unity, and if quietness under our own roof be the next eligible blessing to quietness in our own breast; how ought we to adore that qualification, by which alone, this joy and this blessing are to be obtained?

Again, if we consider ourselves in respect to our fellow creatures, or as members of civil society; since justice is a standard fixed by nature, a well known rule, which all the world acknowledge and appeal to; let us, who are acting in a private station, learn to make it a rule to ourselves, for adjusting our debts and demands, that we may not give less to others, or require more from them, than what justice metes out to us all. The way

to be dealt fairly by, is to deal fairly; if we act uprightly by our neighbour, we may expect, and for the most part shall find, that he will act uprightly by us; and what measure we mete, will generally be measured out to us again: for justice will breed justice, nay, it will soon do more, it will breed benevolence and love: though it is a debt, for whose payment we really deserve no thanks, yet in many cases, the creditor, where it is refused, hath no remedy against his debtor, and in all, will find it difficult to recover it; he, therefore, will think himself under some obligation for the prompt receipt of it, which, by a frequent repetition and retaliation, will necessarily create a mutual confidence and endearment. There is, therefore, a very easy transition from probity to love; they are nearly allied to one another; for, that is the natural parent to friendship, and from being habitually righteous, we soon become benevolent and generous.

But lastly, if justice be such a necessary qualification in private life, how much more valuable must it be in a public station, and especially in those who are the professors and dispensers of it: the influence of the private person, is like that of a weak spring, whose current is small, and reaches but a little way; but they who act in a public character, are the main sources of equity, from which, when open and free, judgment (uncorrupted and pure) *runs down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream*, spreading itself through the whole land, refreshing and enlivening every plant, from the proudest cedar to the humblest moss; then the earth brings forth her increase, and every man, sitting under his fig-tree and his vine, reaps unmolested the fruits of his labours, and enjoys all the blessings of society.

How beautiful are their feet, who are not only the messengers, but the authors of peace, and make the glad tidings which they bring? (Isaiah, lii. 7.) And, how is every breast enlarged at the approach of those venerable magistrates who are clothed with righteousness, and whose judgment is as a robe and a diadem; who make the heart of the innocent to dance for joy, and of the guilty to tremble for fear; who are fathers to the fatherless, and the cause, which they know not, they search out.

Thrice happy is that kingdom, where even-handed Justice bestows her amplest rewards on the most deserving, however obscured in the low vale of life; and weighs out her heaviest punishments to the vilest criminals, however distinguished by their birth, their title, or their fortune.

But however blind she may be with respect to men's persons, may she ever be the most quick-sighted in the discernment of the truth!

May she pour forth the largest vials of her fury upon those caittifs, who dare to violate her courts, or attempt to subvert her judgments by perjury or corruption!

May the injured always find free and easy access to her, and speedy and effectual redress from her!

And may her decrees never lose ought of their value from frivolous delays, or be embarrassed with unreasonable expences!

And may those stewards, who are selected for their abilities and integrity from their brethren, and entrusted with the interpretation of the laws of their country, use their discretionary power in making them contain the substance, as well as the form of justice; and through their liberal constructions, may they abolish that unnatural distinction between legal and right; and prevent this virtue, which is most amiable in her native simplicity, from being enveloped in her drapery!

So shall they who sit in the seat of judgment, be accounted worthy of double honour; worthy to be revered for the high office they bear; and more worthy to be adored for the faithful execution of it.

And so shall they arrive at the highest pitch of glory, that ambition can aspire to, or perfection can reach, either in this world, or the next, viz. the verdict of conscience, and the seal of universal approbation here upon earth, and the ratification of both in that supreme court of justice, where their great Archetype, the all-just Judge of heaven and earth, will sit to receive them with that welcome eulogy; *Well done, ye good and faithful servants; ye have been faithful over a few things, I will make you rulers over many; enter ye into the joy of the Lord.*

SERMON III.

On Reason and Reflection on religious Subjects.

ISAIAH, xlv. 8.

Remember this, and shew yourselves men, bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors!

THE idolatries of the people of Israel are the subject of the two preceding chapters; the Lord, by his prophet Isaiah, is there exclaiming against their folly, in worshipping images: in the xlvth chapter, he expostulates with them in these words: They take part of a tree for fuel, to warm themselves, and the other part they make their God, even their graven image; they fall down unto and worship it, and pray unto it, and say, Deliver me, for thou art my God: none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge or understanding, to say, I have burned part of it in the fire, I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? Shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? Remember these, O Jacob and Israel!

And, in the xlvth chapter, he reasons with them after the same manner, upon their molten, as he had done upon their wooden images; They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance, and hire a goldsmith, and he maketh it a God; they fall down, yea they worship: they bear him upon their shoulders, they carry him, and set him in his place, and he standeth; from his place shall he not remove; yea, one shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble: *Remember this, and shew yourselves men; bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors!*

That is, consider with yourselves, that, what you have set up for your God, is mere senseless matter, incapable of hearing your prayers, or of redressing your wants; and that the whole process, from the beginning to the end, of this apotheosis proves it to be so; therefore shew yourselves men, shew that you have the use of your rational faculties, by examining these self-evident truths, and bring them again to mind.

This

This is the drift and purport of the words of my text; and the use that I shall make of them will be contained in the following observations.

The first remarkable thing implied in them is, that the most glaring absurdities and impieties may be introduced and practised in religious worship.

For what can be more absurd, than to suppose an inanimate material substance, either from the figure it was wrought into, or the ceremonies it passed through, or the place it was enshrined in, to be transformed into a god, invested, at least, with almighty power, for the lowest notion of a Deity includes this attribute, to fall down and worship it, and to pay all kinds of divine honours to it, though, at the same time, there was no visible transformation in the substance itself; but it still retained, to all appearance, every property of lifeless matter. This is such a gross abuse of the senses, and so shocking to common understandings, that it would be an high affront to mankind, even to suppose the possibility of it, was it not known to be an indisputable fact, and warranted by the most authentic records of ancient history.

This idolatry likewise was no less impious than foolish.

The knowledge of the being of a God, of his unity, and infinite perfections, had been communicated to the children of Israel by their inspired writings: they had learned from them, that he had made a covenant with their forefathers, had vouchsafed to style himself the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, and had chosen their seed for his peculiar people; that he had, by an extraordinary providence, rescued them from the Egyptian bondage, preserved them in the wilderness, and settled them in the land of Canaan; that he had instituted a theocracy among them, and, in a very particular manner, guarded them against polytheism and idolatry. The two first commands, which God himself gave to them by the hand of Moses, were, *Thou shalt have no other Gods but me: Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image.* These were written upon a table of stone, for a perpetual standing memorial of their duty; and they were ordered to weave them into their garments, and to inscribe them upon the pillars of their houses, that they might be continually

reminding themselves of them, and from thence transcribe them upon the tables of their hearts. Idolatry likewise was marked out by their law, as a crime of the most capital nature, and inhibited by the severest penalties; for the most dreadful of all temporal punishments, viz. famine, pestilence, and the sword, with utter extirpation, were denounced against the whole nation, should this vice become epidemical: and the individual, in whose house or possession any idol was found, was sentenced to be destroyed, together with his family, and all that appertained to him.

But, notwithstanding all these precautions for preventing the beginning and spreading of this abomination; and, notwithstanding the monstrous absurdities and horrid impieties with which it abounded, in process of time it became the popular and fashionable vice; not only among a few, or for a little time, but among all the tribes, and for many ages; we read of it in the Pentateuch, in the Chronicles of almost every king, and in the writings of all the Prophets. *Their land, saith Isaiah, is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their fingers have made: The mean man boweth down, the great man humbleth himself.*

Hence it is evident, that the most absurd and impious things have been introduced and practised in religious worship; and it is as certain they may be, for the same causes will always produce the same effects, and these causes were not peculiar to the people of Israel, neither were they owing to such rare incidents or critical conjectures as could never happen at any other time, or in any other nation; but they were as general as the ignorance and folly of mankind; which will plainly appear, if we consider, that, as the Deity is the ultimate object of divine worship, the manner and substance of it will be according to the opinions that are conceived of him. Where these opinions are just and true, the religion will be solid and rational: but, should they be imperfect and false, the religion likewise will be maimed or absurd. But imperfect or false opinions result from crude observations, minute reasonings, or ungoverned passions, which are not particular, local, or national, but common to all mankind.

The

The first things that strike the senses, and put men upon thinking of and acknowledging a Supreme Being, are generally the wonderful works of power. Many, indeed, are so thoughtless and stupid, as to let them pass unheeded, in the common course of nature; for though there cannot be stronger proofs of omnipotency than what daily occur to us, and are constantly before our eyes; yet custom, by rendering them familiar, lulls our attention to sleep; but, when God is pleased to shew himself in mighty thunders and lightnings, inundations and earthquakes, in wide-wasting pestilences and famines, then the inhabitants of the earth are roused from their lethargy, all fear and tremble, and an awful sense of a superior being is deeply imprinted upon their minds. Some few, awakened by these alarming instances of this stupendous attribute, will improve upon them, and make farther inquiries into the nature of the Most High; but the generality of mankind will sit down with these terrible ideas, which their panics have raised of him, and, viewing him through the mirror of this passion, will look upon him as a most tremendous being, armed with almighty power, abstracted from every other perfection, and wielding this power with apparent wrath in the destruction of his creatures. It is easy to guess, what the religion of these persons must be; they will worship God as the king of terrors, with a trembling heart; they will cringe before him with the most abject servility, earnestly begging to be exempted from the vengeance of his fury; and, perhaps, would be glad to compound for the favour which Polyphemus conferred on Ulysses, viz. that they might be the last devoured.

There is no passion in human nature which hath been so fruitful of superstitions, as this of fear: it gave rise to that reigning opinion among the ancients, of a self-existent evil being, presiding, at least, over half the world: such was Osiris held to be, among the Egyptians, and, from them, among all the Eastern nations.

Fear produced different effects, according to the different tempers it had to work upon, or the different passions it was compounded with.

In effeminate and pusillanimous minds, where it was the sole or master passion,

the Deity was pictured with the most ghastly forms their affrightened imaginations could draw, and, in the words of the Psalmist, *as a man feared, so was his displeasure*. (Psalm xc. 11.) Hence, some worshiped evil spirits and demons, others enshrined and idolized the most noxious animals, as serpents, dragons, and crocodiles, being the most obnoxious to their fears.

When this passion was balanced with pride and a warm imagination, as either passion prevailed, it held up presumption or despair. If fear was uppermost, the soul was hung with mournful horrors, all was darkness and despair: but, when pride rode triumphant, then the mind was elated with vain confidences upon the favour of the Deity; and the ecstatic fervours which over-weening fancy kindled in the breast of the enthusiast, were interpreted for divine inspirations. Of this kind of worshippers were the Sybilline and Pythian priests and priestesses among the Heathens; the Kataphrygians, or Montanists, and the Marcionians, in the primitive times of Christianity; and such are the Jansenists, Pietists, and Methodists of the present age.

Again, fear operated very differently in stern and imperious constitutions; here the Deity appeared as an inexorable and cruel tyrant. Persons of this rigid complexion, instead of being softened, were brutalized by their religion; inhumanity was incorporated into their divinity, and the more barbarous and savage these devotees made themselves, the nearer resemblance they bore to their Deity; they therefore endeavoured to recommend themselves to him by the most atrocious acts of violence, and from their furious zeal they perpetrated the most shocking murders, butchering innocent persons, nay, even their nearest relations (whose lives, by the strictest ties of nature, honour, and conscience, they were most obliged to preserve), not only deliberately and in cool blood, but devoutly, as a sacred act of piety, and the most acceptable immolation to their God.

Of this class were the votaries of Nemesis and Mars, among the Greeks and Romans, and the worshippers of Moloch, among the Canaanites; these last, as is well known, exercised cruelties upon themselves and their families; for they cut their own flesh with knives and lancets,

lancets, they made their children pass through the fire to his grim idol, and stained his altar with human gore. Of the Jews likewise we read, that some of their fathers shed innocent blood, *even the blood of their sons, and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan, and the land was defiled with blood.* (Psalm cvi. ver. 38.)

But, though fear, or some composition of it, is the general cause, yet several other intemperate passions have been the parents of superstition. Men have made to themselves gods after their own lusts, and have either deified their objects, or set divinities over them. St. Paul says of the Cretians, that *their god was their belly.* And, in another place, *that covetousness is idolatry.* The Apostle, perhaps, might not intend to charge the sensualist or miser with believing pleasure or gold to be real gods, but only with serving them with as much devotion as if they were: however that be, it is certain, some have adored the god of riches, of drunkenness, and libidinous pleasures, as real beings: temples have been erected and consecrated for their service, sacrifices have been offered upon their altars, and their necessary self-existence, with several other properties of a Deity, hath been supposed, by the sacred formalities with which they have been treated, and the solemn addresses made to them.

Innumerable are the phrensies which have sprung from this prolific source; but those already mentioned are abundantly sufficient to establish my first observation, viz. That the most absurd and impious things have been introduced, and practised, in religious worship.

The next observation that naturally offers itself to us, from the words of my text, is, that reason and common sense are the proper judges of religious institutions and doctrines.

The absurdities which the Jews were guilty of in their idolatrous worship, are laid before them in the most plain and familiar manner; God himself, by his Prophet, appeals to their understandings, and argues with them from the principles of human reason: he bids them judge, whether it was not a shocking abuse of common sense, to suppose the residue of a log of wood, part of which they had burned in the fire, and warmed them-

selves with, to be metamorphosed, without any visible change in its substance, into an immaterial, immortal, and self-existing being; to prostrate themselves before it, and pay all kinds of divine honours to it, as if it was the sovereign lord of heaven and earth, from whom they received all they had, and expected all they wanted. Remember this; that is, reflect and consider with yourselves, upon the absurdity of this behaviour. Prove this idol by your senses, whether it hath not all the properties of wood; view it, doth it not retain all the appearance of a senseless block? Are there any signs of life or motion in it? Handle it, is it not hard and impenetrable? May it not be cleft, or sawed, or used in the same manner as any other piece of timber? Put it into the fire, will it not burn as freely as the other part? What difference is there between them? Only compare them, and you will find none; why then do you think so differently of them? or, if you trust to your senses and judgment in one case, why do you give them up in another? This partial application of your understanding is unbecoming the character of a rational being; exert, therefore, your intellectual faculties in every case, and shew yourselves men, as well in religious as natural subjects.

From this familiar expostulation of the Deity with the Jews, upon the vanity of their idolatries, from his putting these things to the test of their senses and their understandings, and, from this divine injunction, to acquit themselves like men, by canvassing, considering, and reflecting upon them, I infer, that human reason is a proper judge of religious subjects, and that it is incumbent upon every rational being to try them by it.

This is a direct and immediate consequence from the words of my text, and the occasion of them: for it will not be said, that reason is to sit upon this kind of superstition and no other; all are alike absurd and impious; if, therefore, we must judge of one, we may judge of all; for, otherwise, how is it possible to know which is subject to our scrutiny and which not? or what should exempt any from it? Which are the vanities that have the privilege of taking such sanctuary in religion, as to make

make it a profanation for reason to touch them? or which should be so idolized, as to have it sacrificed to them?

And, surely, it will not be said, that we may judge of superstition but not of religion: the permission to try base, but not sterling gold, carries an inconsistency along with it; for how are we to distinguish them from each other, till we have tried them; and, by trying what is false, we must try what is true, the one necessarily implies the other; for if we are to put nothing into the scales of reason, but what is light, it is supposed that we know what is light, and what is not, before we have weighed it; that is, we know it without reason, which is absurd, and contrary to what was admitted; if, therefore, counterfeit religion may be brought to the balance of reason, true religion may be so likewise.

And again, if religion in general be once admitted, it must always continue to be the subject of reason; for there is nothing in the nature of religion that should render it at one time less subject to it than another; besides, there may be innovations in religion, corrupt doctrines or practices, like the tares among the wheat, may be sowed, or grow up with it, and which cannot be separated from it, unless reason retains its power over it: the understanding, likewise, may be stronger, or better informed, by which means, errors in the first judgment may be rectified in the second; and, therefore, reason being once, must always continue to be, a judge of it.

But the importance of this subject deserves, and demands, a fuller and more particular discussion.

Reason, then, is the peculiar property of man, which distinguishes him from, and sets him above, the whole visible creation.

Other beings have external senses in common with him, they see, feel, smell, and hear, and some of them in a more exquisite degree than he doth: these senses, likewise, are a kind of mechanical powers, receiving their images from extraneous objects, and conveying them to the sensorium by fixed laws of nature; and, whilst things continue in the same state, they act, and are acted upon, in the same manner, and are subject to no changes but what are independent or involuntary. Again, man can claim no pre-eminence over the animal world from

his appetites or affections; they are blind and necessary attractions or repulsions, having no guidance or directions of themselves, but permanently tend to, or from, the same things: other creatures not only enjoy them in common with him, but seemingly in greater perfection; for they have them moderated by nature, and scarce subject to excess; but in men they are apt to be riotous, and, if left to themselves, will prove him insane and monstrous.

Memory, imagination, invention, and conscience, are the appendages of reason, they necessarily accompany it, and must be reckoned as the consequential parts of it.

Man, therefore, exclusive of his intellectual powers, differs from inferior animals in no other manner, than as they; in their several species, differ from one another, and would be properly placed under the same genus of necessary irrational agents.

It is reason, then, that ennobles his nature, and exalts him to a much superior class.

But this superiority will appear more evident, if we consider the privileges it confers upon him.

For, first, it is the principle of liberty: it exempts him from the chains of necessity, and renders him a free agent: it enables him to collect, compare, and reflect upon the reports of his senses, and to superintend and moderate his appetites and passions, and, in many natural things, to discern between truth and falsehood. I do not assert that man is a perfectly free agent, any more than he is a perfectly rational being; he is only both in part, and hath the principles of necessity as well as liberty within him; all that is meant is, that, so far as man is free, he is entirely beholden to his reason for it.

But, however small a portion of it his munificent Creator hath been pleased to honour him with, yet, if he be compared with creatures wholly void of it, what a mighty difference doth it make between them! and what prodigious advantages doth he enjoy from it over them? Doth it not render him, in a most eminent degree, a contemplative, conversible, and communicative being? With what enlarged capacities doth he act in social and political life? What a field of speculation and practice doth it open to him? Doth he

he not from hence derive all his attainments in wisdom and philosophy, in arts, sciences, and manufactures? And doth it not give birth to infinite employments for the procurement of the necessaries and conveniencies of life?

But, secondly, it is the peculiar excellency of reason to be the principle of morality; for it furnishes man with a sense of the circumstances he is placed in, of the connections with and relations to, the persons he is concerned with: it likewise supplies him with a consciousness of an obligation to act agreeable to them. From this principle, he perceives what good things Providence hath done for him, and what he expects him to do for himself. Thus it sets a rule before him for the direction of the liberty, and the use of the powers, it hath conferred upon him: it doth not, indeed, set a rule before him of its own making, but only makes it known to him; for truth and rectitude are in nature and independent of him, and the knowledge of them his reason, in part, communicates to him, and informs him that they are the institutions of the God of nature, who wills his conformity to them. Thus reason constitutes him a moral agent, and invests him with the power of being wise or foolish, virtuous or vicious, good or evil.

Reason, by making us moral, makes us religious beings; for morality comprehends our whole conduct, when applied to good and evil; and religion is included in it, as it is that branch of it which relates to the Deity.

But, to be more explicit upon this subject, we will consider reason, in respect both to natural and revealed religion.

The whole of natural religion is evidently founded upon reason: for how do we acquire any idea of a Supreme Being? It cannot be from our external senses, because he is an invisible spiritual substance: neither can it be from our affections; for, though they may feel the effects of his power or goodness, they are tied down to the present objects, and cannot abstract ideas, or separate goodness or power from them, and place them in some agent: this would be inferring causes from effects, which is the province or property of reason. Every apprehension, therefore, of the Deity, implies some act of the understanding, and every notion or conception of him is according to its use

of the means which lead to the knowledge of him; hence, reason lays the foundation of natural religion, by discovering the great object of it.

In like manner, as it helps us to the knowledge of the Supreme Being, so, through its means, we acquire a sense of our relation to, and connection with him; for this results from the consideration of his infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, and of our weakness, ignorance, and dependency; and from these abstract ideas, it still proceeds to abstract others from them, and to infer the duties of reverence, love, thanksgiving, gratitude, resignation, obedience, and every other part of pious devotion.

Thus are we indebted for the whole sum and substance of natural religion to the powers of reason; and it is called the religion of nature, or the Catholic religion, because it is the religion which the light of nature or the reason of mankind discovers to us; and as reason is the sole author of it to us, so it must be a proper and sufficient judge of all that appertains to it.

Let us now proceed to examine how far revealed religion comes under the province of reason; and, for setting this point in a clear light, we will consider reason first with respect to the proofs, and then to the doctrines of revelation.

First, then, in respect to its proofs.

In order to convince mankind of a revelation from God, there must, of necessity, be an appeal made to their understandings; and the making this appeal supposes the understanding to be a competent judge of it, or that the proofs offered are suited to its capacities, and sufficient for a rational conviction.

This, likewise, is evident from the nature of the proofs themselves:

For they are of two kinds, external and internal. The external are proofs of a supernatural power or knowledge; the internal, of the divinity of that power or knowledge. The external proofs are manifest appeals to the understanding, through the senses: of this kind are miracles and prophecies, with their completion, which, being exhibited in an unreserved and public manner, are visible demonstrations of a supernatural power or knowledge; and the extraordinary dignity of the person who is endowed with them. There may be some internal proofs

proofs intermixed with them, but, for perspicuity's sake, we must consider them abstractedly from them, and barely as external proofs: and as such they are laid before us, on purpose to convince us of a supernatural power or knowledge; they are submitted to our reason, and we are called upon to make it the test or judge of them; and therefore it is its proper office to examine whether there is any deception in them, and whether they are really what they pretend to be, and manifestly exceed the ordinary powers of nature; and, if we be not eye-witnesses of these proofs, but receive them from the relation of those who were, or from more distant tradition, then it is its business to inquire diligently into the number and credibility of the relators; or the authenticity and universality of the tradition, and, from thence, to form its judgment of them. Reason, therefore, in all cases, is evidently a proper judge of the external proofs of a revelation; and, from a review of this part of its credentials, it refers us to the examination of the other part, viz. the internal proofs; and these are the doctrines of a revelation which are level to our understandings, and which are supposed, from the nature of a proof itself, to be tried by the principles of reason; but these principles are the established rules of morality, and the general received opinions of the being and attributes of the Deity: these are laid down as standard truths, and we are to judge of the divinity of a revelation, from the agreement or disagreement of its subject matter with them: that is, we are to consider whether any thing is advanced inconsistent with natural duty; whether it contains any doctrine that is absurd, inhuman, or impious, or contrary to the common sense of mankind, or the common received laws of morality; whether it discourages virtue, or countenances vice; or whether it be, in any circumstance, unworthy of the Deity, or derogatory of the perfections, which, by the Catholic religion, are ascribed to him: should any thing of this kind appear, it will sink itself, and whatever adheres to it; this single testimony will outweigh all other evidences; and, whatever signs of power, should even an angel from heaven come to prove its divinity, yet they would be over balanced by the proofs which reason brings against it.

But if no lesson be taught contrary to what is contained in the book of nature, nor any Scripture tend to obliterate the characters written so plainly on the heart, that he who runs may read them; if there should be found a complete harmony between natural and revealed religion; if this should ratify, restore, improve, and enforce the moral law; if the more strictly it be canvassed, the more rational it appears; and, in general, if it be such a revelation as human understanding, when best informed, hath abundant reason to suppose an omnipotent, omniscient, all-just and all-gracious Sovereign of the world would make, whenever he should vouchsafe to communicate, in this explicit manner, his will to mankind, then there are all the concurrent testimonies of supernatural power, wisdom, and goodness, in the works of revelation, to establish its divinity, as there are, in the works of nature, to convince us of the being and perfections of God: in both cases the proofs are of the same kind, they are appeals to human understandings, or they are references to a standard set up by human reason, and which is no other than the natural and moral truths which the common sense of mankind hath recognized and admitted, as first principles.

Lastly: How can it be ascertained what is worthy or unworthy of the Deity, but by applying it to those general conceptions, which, through the light of nature, have been formed of him? There must be an antecedent worthiness or unworthiness in the mind, and the idea of wisdom, power, and goodness, must be there first established by reason; which is made the rule or canon for trying the things that are attributed to him.

Mistake me not; I do not assert that human reason is an adequate judge of the actions of the Almighty, or that man hath any right to sit upon them, and determine, in an absolute sense, what is worthy or unworthy of the supreme governor of the world; he hath no business to concern himself with his administration, any farther than as it relates to himself, and is the necessary subject matter for forming his faith, or adjusting his conduct; and so far it is submitted to his examination.

The works of the Deity are infinite in their number and kind; they are set at all distances from us; some few lie just before us; they are placed at a proper point

point of view, and we have a full sight of them.

Some are a little farther distant from us; great part of them appear distinct, but some part is confused.

Again; others are still farther removed; here the distinctness grows less, and the confusion increases; till at length we lose all sight of them.

What then are in the reach of our understanding, are nothing in comparison to what are beyond it, and, as these removes are infinite, so are the objects in them, which must, of necessity, be incomprehensible or mysterious to us: all, indeed, declare the wisdom, power, and goodness of their great creator; but the few only which are perceptible by us, either in whole or in part, declare them to us. These are properly our demonstrations of the being and attributes of God, and these we may canvass; for he who made both us and them, hath made us a judge of them, by adapting our capacities to them, and setting them as proofs of himself to us. These, then, are the revelations of the Deity in natural religion; here we plainly see his footsteps; and upon these we rest our faith in him, and infer, that all things above our understanding are alike the works of his hands, and equally perfect in their kinds.

Just so it is in revealed religion: what is plain and obvious, is the object of reason, and submitted to human judgment; it is the evidence of its truth, and also of the things above our comprehension communicated to us; from all which it manifestly appears, that reason is a judge of the internal, as well as the external proofs, of a revelation.

What remains is, to consider reason with respect to the doctrines of revelation: but we have, in some part, anticipated this subject; for these doctrines are either plain and simple, or sublime and mysterious.

The plain and simple doctrines, we have just now observed, are its internal evidences, and of which reason is a judge.

Sublime or mysterious doctrines are of a mixed nature, partly above our comprehension, and partly on a level with it; and where they are on a level with it, they are internal proofs of a revelation; but where they are mysterious, revelation is a proof of them; and, therefore, they must be considered in a double capacity,

in an antecedent and subsequent sense to the revelation, and, consequently, they are reciprocally dependent upon one another. For instance, should any point of doctrine or matter of fact be promulgated in part, of which we were before wholly ignorant, and afterwards have no other means of attaining to the knowledge of it, but through this promulgation, then, in the parts which are not revealed, the subject is mysterious or incomprehensible, we can form no determinate idea of it; we have no data or principles to go upon; and therefore, in these respects, it is not the subject of reason; but the parts which are discovered to us, are within our comprehension; we can conceive that it doth or will exist, and in such a manner, with such circumstances, properties, qualities, and effects, as are disclosed to us; and this existence, these circumstances, properties, qualities, and effects, may be brought to, and tried at the bar of reason; there it may be inquired, whether any of them imply any natural impossibility or absurdity? whether they are contrary to any principles of truth, or the standing rules of equity? What is discovered to us, may likewise be a subject of our inquiry, what uses it hath? what ends it serves? and, in general, whether it is worthy of the Deity to communicate to mankind, or suitable to the dignity and importance of a divine mission? In these respects, it is comprehensible and plain, and is an internal proof of a revelation, and falls within the cognizance and judgment of human reason.

Thus, should there be a revelation of future rewards and punishments, and should the world be only informed, in general, that all men will be recompensed in another life according to what they have done in this; but should there be no determinate time or place assigned for this distribution, and no description given of their manner or kind; then, in these respects, we should be wholly in the dark; reason hath no light to direct its steps, and therefore it hath no concern with them; and whatever should be suggested concerning them, would be nothing but the dreams or hallucinations of fancy; for, if the eye hath not seen, nor the ear heard; if it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive, what things are prepared for them who love or hate God, they

they must be above our comprehension, and can be no subjects of human inquiry.

But we can reason upon what is revealed, as upon rewards and punishments in general, upon their nature, and upon the use or necessity of additional motives for the encouragement of virtue, and the suppression of vice; we can inquire, likewise, into their propriety for the subject of an evangelical mission. That these are the topics of reason, and the internal testimonies of the divinity of a revelation, will evidently appear from a contrary supposition; for should any pretenders to inspiration declare, that the wicked man would be rewarded with happiness in another world, according to the evil he hath done in this life, and that the virtuous will be miserable in proportion to the good he hath committed here, this repugnancy, with the first principles of justice, would be an ample refutation of what he advanced, and an infallible proof of an imposture.

Again; when it is insisted upon, as an article of faith, or a doctrine of revelation, that the bread and wine in the eucharist are actually changed into the real body and blood of Christ: here, upon the supposition of such a change, reason could be no judge of the circumstances or manner of it, how, or which way it was done, if the revelation was silent upon these points; and, in this sense, the transubstantiation would be mysterious or incomprehensible; but the understanding and external senses are competent judges of the effect, or whether there is such a change; here it may be examined whether it includes any natural contradiction, or supposes the same body to be in different places at the same time; here we can reason upon it, after the same manner as the Jews were commanded to do upon their wooden god; we can try the elements by our senses, whether they have the appearance, the touch, and taste of bread and wine; we can prove them by sundry experiments; and if, from the report of all our senses, they still retain the properties of those elements, have we not the same authority, and that authority was divine, for trusting to our senses and understanding, and inferring, that they are the same bread and wine, after consecration, with the elements from which they were taken, as the Jews had to conclude that their idols, after they had been

consecrated and enshrined, were still the same wood with the block from which they were hewn?

Hence this pretended transmutation, which flies so violently in the face of common sense, and is charged with the most shocking consequences, cannot be a doctrine of revelation; but the passage in holy writ from whence it is taken, must have a figurative or allegorical meaning; and, with this meaning, it will appear easy and natural, agreeable to the context and the intention of the author.

Thus are we beholden to reason and common sense for exploding this absurd and blasphemous doctrine; for restoring a divine institution to its primitive purity, and rescuing our holy religion from superstitions as gross as ever were practised by the most ignorant and idolatrous Pagans.

We are commanded to prove all things (1 Theff.), and to try the spirits, whether they be of God (1 John, iv.); but with what shall we prove them, or how shall this trial be made, unless it be by the understanding? This, then, is the touchstone which they must be brought to; and if they will not stand this test, they may be safely pronounced false and counterfeit. When any of our modern enthusiasts presume upon the gift of inspiration; when they call their external fervours, holy energies, and confidently assure us that the Shechinah, or divine presence, is in the tabernacle of their hearts, from the illuminations they perceive within them; should no other argument be offered but what is thus locked up in the closet of their minds, and nothing transpire from thence, reason would be excluded from all examination; for what judgment could be formed of experiences which cannot be described, of which no idea could be communicated, save to those who had felt them? we might, indeed, look upon them as travellers into an imaginary world, and suspend our faith concerning their marvellous reports, but we could neither confirm nor disprove them. But, should these internal workings of the spirit burst forth at the door of their lips, and vent themselves in ecstatic ejaculations to the Deity, and unpremeditated discourses to the people, then they would come within the cognizance of human reason, and afford ample matter for the meanest capacities to try what spirit they are of.

Should

Should it then appear that they speak with more than the tongue of angels, and as no man ever did; should they approve themselves to be the oracles of truth, and say nothing unbecoming the Holy Spirit to utter, then he who hath ears to hear let him hear; let all men resort to their tabernacles and their oratories; let no word of theirs fall to the ground, but let every syllable be written in letters of gold, and faithfully preserved, as the sacred records of heaven.

But should their extemporaneous harangues be a mere rhapsody of nonsense, an indigested chaos without form or substance, frequently false, and, sometimes, impious and blasphemous; should they invoke the God of wisdom with vain, foolish, and presumptuous supplications, or approach the throne of the Almighty Sovereign of heaven and earth with addresses which a rational being would be ashamed to make or receive, from the lowest of his fellow-creatures;

Then out of their own mouths would they be condemned, and their own lips would prove them perverse: then would reason have sufficient testimonies to pronounce that they are dupes to their own vanity, that their zeal is without knowledge, that the spirit which works within them is a spirit of enthusiastic madness, practising illusions upon their minds, palming upon them the most profound ignorance for the sublimest wisdom, and giving utterance to their folly, and that the light within them is nothing but darkness, or the false glare of an ignis fatuus, which their over-heated imaginations have kindled in their breasts.

It is no wonder, that these flaming bigots should be so violent against reason, when reason is so strong against them; but let them take care how they dismiss their understandings, lest they should be deemed beside themselves in those things where they will not admit the use of it; and he who is out of his senses in any one point, is certainly a disordered person, however rational he may acquit himself in all others: these enthusiasts, therefore, are a kind of Don Quixotes in religion: they may talk sensibly, and shew themselves men upon indifferent subjects, but, touch upon religion, and their understanding is fled, and they are taken with fits of lunacy.

Thus have I endeavoured to make good

my second observation, viz. That reason and common sense are the proper judges of religious doctrines; for there are none so sublime and mysterious but what are, in some part, on a level with our understanding, and there it is a competent judge of them; and even in those parts which are above our comprehension, though nothing can be ascertained from their nature, yet an opinion may be formed of their credibility, from what is known of them, and from an enquiry into the knowledge and veracity of the persons upon whose testimony they stand; and there it is a sufficient judge, not to determine, scientifically, whether the doctrine be true or false, but to determine whether it be an object of our assent or dissent; and though faith, founded upon such evidences, may be styled implicit, yet, as it is builded upon the best informations that can be got, it is the most rational faith that our imperfect nature will admit of; and, therefore, reason is, in every sense, a proper test of religious subjects.

The third and last inference that I shall make upon the words of my text, is the necessity and advantage of remembrance or recollection in religious subjects; *Bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors!*

It is not enough to shew ourselves men, by exerting our intellectual powers, in acquiring a rational conviction; but we must persevere in the exercise of them, to retain that conviction. Religious and moral truths are rules of practice in daily use for adjusting our conduct; and therefore they should be strong and effective principles in the mind, always uppermost in our thoughts, and ready to offer themselves to us upon every emergency; for which end it is necessary to imprint them deeply on our hearts, and constantly renew their impression, by refreshing our memories with them, and continually reflecting upon them.

Most of these practical truths are axioms; there are rarely any mediums clearer than themselves to prove them by, and they are generally so self-evident, as not to need them; so that if the mind be in a state of conviction, they will be acknowledged almost as soon as heard: men do not want so much a logician as a prompter, and reasoning, especially on common, moral or religious topics, is little more than a repetition or recollection of what

is known. The chief use in discoursing on such subjects, in exhibiting them in various lights, illustrating them by examples, confirming them by different kinds of proofs, and exposing the absurdities of their contraries, is to engage and detain the attention, to renew the knowledge of them, and imprint them upon the mind. It is easy to bring men to a speculative assent, or an indifferent acquiescence in these truths; but the difficulty lies in raising in them a thorough hearty conviction, in keeping it alive, and making it influence their practice.

The memory is of itself naturally weak, and soon lets go any thing that is not often inculcated, or strictly committed to its charge, and we frequently render it much weaker by our prejudices, partialities, and passions; present pleasures or profits are strangely apt to engross the attention, and suppress the little memory we have of duty that offers to rise up against them. Men do not err from natural ignorance, but from wilful forgetfulness; they know what is right, but they will not think of it, they thrust it from them.

To do as we would be done by, is such an evident principle of equity, that every one subscribes to it upon the first hearing; and the reason, why it is not as universally practised, is, because it is excluded by other thoughts, and from want of being recollected or brought again to mind, it is the same as if it never had been there, and is an inactive dead principle within us.

In like manner, an intelligent being could never be brought to offer the greatest violence to his senses, and stupidly practise the grossest absurdities in religion, was he not intoxicated with the fumes of superstition and enthusiasm, and determined to shut his eyes and sleep upon his duty.

To conclude: From the whole of what hath been observed in this discourse, let us consider, that religion is a subject of the highest importance; that it is the behaviour of a creature to his Creator, or of a rational being to the God of reason. Let us consider, likewise, what gross absurdities and horrid impieties have been, and may be introduced into religious worship; and, as it appears that reason is a competent judge and a proper test of its doctrines, and that there is no security against these corruptions but the un-

derstanding; it must be principally incumbent on us to exert ourselves in the application of it to these subjects. In order, therefore, to raise ourselves from the slumbers of enthusiasm and superstition, we should do well to have a remembrance, after the example of Philip, king of Macedon, who might put us daily in mind that we are men, that we have the use of rational faculties, and should shew that we have the use of them upon every occasion; and, since God hath distinguished us for intelligent beings, we ought to distinguish ourselves as such, and most especially in those things which relate to him. If it be our duty and our interest to consider and shew ourselves men in all other respects, why must religion alone be exempted from it? If reason makes us religious beings, how can it be supposed that religion should make us the most irrational? If the service of our Maker be our noblest employment, why doth it not merit our noblest endowment? Or, why must we shew ourselves less than men, in that which will make us more than men? Who hath required this at our hands? Surely the God of wisdom, who hath clothed us with this wedding garment, will never expect that we should strip ourselves of it when we come into his presence. This then is a nakedness which we ought to be most ashamed of, and, instead of exposing ourselves before him, we should rather call upon the mountains to cover us, and the hills to fall on us. Let us, therefore, above all things, take care how we offer upon the altar of infinite wisdom the sacrifice of fools; and let us endeavour to recommend ourselves to him, who is pure intelligence itself, by heightening the resemblance we bear of him, and worshipping him in spirit and in truth.

SERMON IV. On an Evil Conscience.

ACTS, xxiv. 16.

Herein do I exercise myself, to have a conscience void of offence, towards God and towards men.

WHEN men act against the dictates of their conscience, or its sense upon the mind, and it upbraids them for it; or when through any habitual contempt of

or disobedience to its dictates, it is wearied out, and ceases from its admonitions and remonstrances, then they have an evil or a bad conscience :

Or otherwise, when men act against, or forbear to act according to the sense of their minds, as to right or wrong; or when they have lost all sense of right and wrong, they have an evil or a bad conscience.

As a false judgment of moral good and evil is the cause of an erroneous conscience; so a false judgment of natural good and evil is the original cause of an evil conscience: though it is impossible, in the nature of things, that the ways of righteousness and truth, should, upon the whole, be unpleasant or unprofitable; or, that the ways of iniquity and falsehood should be agreeable or useful; yet we may think otherwise, and this thought will be introductory of an evil conscience: when we have in our imagination divorced interest from virtue, and misery from vice, and joined together what are really farthest asunder, then we have laid a stumbling-block in our way which we cannot get over; then we have raised distractions in our minds, and made the two strongest principles in human nature to pull contrary ways; and, if they be not reconciled, the sense of interest will generally prevail over that of duty, and compel us to act against the latter.

Thus, when men have judged one thing to be their duty, and another their interest, they have brought themselves into that miserable condition of approving what is best, and doing what is worst, or in the Scripture language, *They have set up a law in their members to war against the law of their minds, bringing them into captivity to the law of sin.* (Rom. vii. 23.) For then the good which conscience would, they do not; and the evil which it would not, that they do.

Hence, the want of knowledge is the root of an evil as well as of an erroneous conscience; and the principal difference between them is, we are ignorant of our natural interest in the one, and of moral truth in the other; in the last, indeed, when we are mistaken concerning truth, conscience is not privy to it, and we act according to its sense upon the mind, so that we are in no other fault, but of making a wrong judgment: but in the false opinion of interest, conscience dissents

from and protests against it, so that here we commit a double crime; we act not only without the knowledge of our interest, but against the knowledge of our duty; and it is a mighty aggravation, that we are conscious of doing wrong, we sin with our eyes open, and fly in the face of guilt.

The great objects of the understanding, are interest and right; what is right in most ordinary cases, is indeed plain and obvious; it is the common sense of mankind, *the wayfaring man, though a fool, cannot err therein*; here the whole business of the understanding is to ascertain our interest; and this is readily done from the sense of right, for it is a very easy and natural conclusion, that what is right must be profitable, and what is wrong, prejudicial; and if we would rest here, and put an implicit faith in this consideration, we could not err, but should have knowledge enough; we should be able to reconcile our duty to our interest, which is the one thing needful for preserving harmony in our minds, and consistency in our actions, and for securing our present and future welfare; but our misfortune, or rather our fault, is, we are apt to let go this clue, and to bewilder ourselves in the mazes of apparent interest; for all things approach towards us with a fair external shew, and seem to proffer some good to us; our appetites and passions solicit us with their gratifications, every fancy hath its charm, every vice hath its temptation, and allures us with some present pleasure or profit; intemperance holds out to us sensual delights, and promises to drown our cares and raise our spirits; and injustice holds forth the gilded bait of lucre in the fairest point of view, and flatters us with secrecy and impunity: amidst this infinite variety of proposals, if we do not take our sense of right and wrong as our guide, and try them by this touchstone, it is great odds but we make a wrong choice, and provoke our conscience to confront us with its obligations; and if we do not know our interest, that will make us know our duty, and though it may not be able to enforce its practice, it will make us rue the neglect of it; and this is what we call an evil conscience, not because it is in itself evil, but from the evils it brings with it; for, from the distress it is in, and the reluctancies and oppositions it makes, it is a continual tor-

ment and plague to us, and therefore it is more properly stiled a troubled conscience.

The acting against conscience, is sometimes called a violation of it, because it is a prostitution of it to evil purposes, or putting a force upon it, and breaking through all its ties of honour and duty: it is also called a defilement of conscience, as it is a debasement of its sense of virtue, a pollution or contamination of the heart, and making it a sink for foul and vitious thoughts.

But there also is a species of conscience, which is called evil from its own intrinsic badness, and that is, when it is deficient in its office, and disabled from discharging its natural functions, and therefore it is, more justly speaking, a bad rather than an evil conscience; when men have prospered in an habitual course of iniquity, and conscience hath been long insulted and trampled upon, then it will at length become silent and stupid, the mind will to all appearance have lost its sense of right and wrong, and feel no consciousness of shame or guilt; this is, what is sometimes called an hardened heart, or a callous conscience, or, to use the expression of St. Paul, *a conscience seared as it were with a hot iron*.

But though conscience may be thus silenced for a time, and the sinner unmolested triumph in his sins, yet it may be justly questioned, whether it can be totally subdued and destroyed; when it is wearied out with fruitless chiding, it may lay itself down to rest, but its sleep will not be unto death: at certain seasons it will rouse from its slumber, and reassume its pristine office and power.

When the gay flattering scenes of vanity are passed away and succeeded by infamy and distress, then the prodigal begins to reflect upon his past conduct, his sins fly in his face, and his conscience comes forth like a strong man awakened from his trance, and will atone for its past remissness by its present intention; or, like an elastic body, which having been long bent against its nature, will, when loosed, fly with as much violence the contrary way: struck, therefore, with the sense of guilt, the sinner will sink under the terrors of his own mind.

When the sons of Jacob, through their hatred to their brother Joseph, had purposed to kill him, they were diverted

from it by a fortunate opportunity, which at that instant presented itself to them of selling him to some itinerant Ishmaelites who happened to be passing that way: whilst things went on prosperously with them, and their father gave credit to their feigned story of his having been killed by wild beasts, they felt no remorse for this unnatural treatment of their brother; but some years after, when there was a sore famine in Canaan, and they being sent down to buy corn in Egypt for their sustenance, were taken up for spies, and committed to prison, then their hearts smote them, and they said one to another, We were very guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, and he besought us, and we would not hear him; therefore is this distress come upon us, and behold his blood is required of us: their guilt, like some corporeal maladies, which lurk in the blood till sickly seasons bring them forth, laid perdue in their minds, till these afflictions came upon them; then it broke out, and every circumstance of their cruelty towards him appeared as fresh in their memories, as if it had been but just done: his cries sounded in their ears and pierced their hearts, and they charged themselves, not only with selling him for a slave, but for the consequences of that slavery, which, from the misgivings of their minds, they concluded must be death, and that the vengeance of the Almighty had now overtaken them for it.

From this piece of history we may learn, that a wicked man is never secure from a guilty conscience; and it is well worth observing, how terribly the house of sin is divided against itself, when its members are so far from trusting one another, that they cannot trust themselves: let their crimes be ever so secretly committed, their own hearts must be privy to them; and these accomplices will, without any reward, impeach them; a guilty person needs no accuser; his conscience will do this office to himself, and sometimes to the world; for there are many instances of conscience arresting the criminal, dragging him forth to justice, extorting a confession of his villany, and forcing him to seek for exemplary punishments from without, as a relief from the pangs he endures within: *Wickedness, saith the wise man, condemned by her own witness, is very timorous, and being prised*

with conscience, always forecasteth evil things. (Wisd. xvii. 11.) The conscious wretch is haunted with the spectres that his troubled imagination conjures up before him; he startles at every noise; thinks every whisper is fraught with the tale of his wickedness, and that the finger of scorn is continually pointing at him: every thing also seems to be hung with the gloominess of his soul, while his understanding serves, like a glimmering taper, only to shew the dismal scene, and render its horrors more visible.

The story of Bessus, a native of Pæonia in Greece, comes as well authenticated to us, as any thing in ancient profane history, and hath always been received as an indisputable fact. (Plut. de Numinis Vind.) It is this in short:

His neighbours seeing him one day extremely earnest in pulling down some birds nests near his house, and passionately destroying their young, could not help taking notice of it, and upbraided him for his ill nature and cruelty; to which he replied, that he could not bear them, they were always twitting him with the murder of his father: this execrable villany had lain concealed for many years and never been suspected, and in all probability, would never have come to light, had not the avenging fury of conscience, by these extraordinary means, drawn a public acknowledgment of it from the parricide's own mouth.

The wicked, says the prophet Isaiah, are like the troubled sea, whose waves cast up mire and dirt, foaming out their own shame: there is no peace, says my God, to the wicked; (Isaiah, lvii. 20, 21.) for his conscience, like Micaiah to Ahab, never prophesieth good concerning him, but only evil continually; *And the spirit of a man, saith Solomon, can bear his infirmities, but a wounded spirit who can bear?* (Prov. xviii. 14.) When our strength is turned into weakness, and that which supporteth every thing, wants itself a support, where shall we find it?

And as there is no bearing an evil conscience, so there is no flying from it; when it seizes us, should we say to it, *Hast thou found me, O my enemy? It will answer as Elijah did to Ahab, I have found thee, because thou hast sold thyself to do evil.* (1 Kings, xxi. 20.)

And again, there is no shaking off this viper of conscience, it lays fast hold of

us, it lies down with us, and stings us in our sleep, it rises with us, and preys upon our vitals; hence, ancient moralists compared an evil conscience to a vulture feeding upon our liver, and the pangs that are felt under the one to the throws of the other; supposing, at the same time, the vulture's hunger to be insatiable, and this entrail to be most exquisitely sensible of pain, and to grow as fast as it is devoured: this, truly, must be allowed to be as strong a representation of the most lingering, as well as the most acute corporeal pains as can be drawn; yet, strong as it is, it falls greatly short of the anguish of a guilty conscience; and indeed it is not in the power of the imagination, when at rest, to conceive the horrors which itself when troubled can raise, or the tortures it can put us to.

But it is now time to turn from this dreary scene, to the more pleasing view of a good conscience, which is the last thing we proposed to treat of, and may be described in the following manner.

When no opportunities or means have been omitted for acquiring the knowledge of good and evil, when the natural powers of the mind have been cherished and strengthened, and a lively sense of duty is ever present with us, and influencing our whole conduct: or, in other words,

When the mind, upon a review of our past life, is conscious of no disobedience to its judgment enlightened to the best of our abilities, and feels a cheerful readiness to follow it in our future behaviour, then we have a good conscience, or a conscience void of offence.

Or again, from our explanation of the two other kinds of conscience, it may be described negatively in a more concise manner, *viz.*

When we have neither an erroneous, nor an evil or bad conscience; or have acted neither without nor against knowledge, then we have a good conscience.

There are three kinds of a good conscience:

The first is an entire perfect conscience, void of every offence, both in knowledge and practice.

But since it is morally impossible for finite and frail beings to have committed no errors of judgment, nor to have swerved in the least from their duty, or to have arrived to a complete state of im-

peccability; so no man can be said to have this conscience.

Secondly, Men in the same sense that they may be called good, may be said to have a good conscience; that is, if they have fallen into no gross errors upon moral subjects, if they have contracted no vicious habits, indulged no criminal excesses, nor can charge themselves with any flagrant violations of duty, or any other failings than what mankind are incident to, from the general infirmity of their nature, and have also repented of these: then they have a sound mind, and a sound heart, and may be said, humanly speaking, to have a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man.

Lastly, When the infatuated enthusiast, or superstitious bigot, is convinced of his errors; or when profligate sinners turn from their iniquities and become sincere penitents, and their consciences approve of their reformation, and their minds being eased of their guilt speak peace to them; then they also may be said to have a good conscience.

This indeed is the lowest degree of a good conscience; it is negatively good, that is, it is not an evil conscience; the mind is not troubled; its calmness, likewise, may seem the more agreeable for coming after a storm; and it may be elevated with some sudden transports of joy, from being lightened of the burden, with which it was oppressed.

But the other kind of a good conscience hath a settled complacency and permanent gladness of heart; which is true self-enjoyment and solid happiness; and which we may call our own, both as it is of our own acquisition, and as it is inseparable from us: all other things are uncertain and precarious to us; they are subjected to time and chance; many unforeseen accidents may happen to break the best concerted schemes, and we can attain to no more than a probability in externals: even virtue itself cannot ensure them to us: temperance is the natural means for health and long life: and riches are the wages of industry and frugality, that is, they will probably help us to them, but they can give us no absolute security, either for their attainment or possession: many things may occur to interrupt the temperate man's health and shorten his days; and riches may never

come, or being come, may soon take wing and fly away.

But internal health and wealth are the sure rewards of virtue: *Though the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill* (Eccles. ix. 11.); yet peace and satisfaction of mind are always to a good man.

This is a never failing event; and we may say with much more reason than Timoleon the son of Conon did, when he boasted of his successes in the wars, *That here fortune hath no share*.—Job held fast his integrity, even Satan himself could not wrest it from him, though he had stripped him of every thing else; and holding this, he secured the riches of his mind, and easily supported himself under all his other losses.

When conscience smiles, all nature sympathizes with it, and seems to dance for joy: *A good man is satisfied from himself* (Prov. xiv. 14.); he hath an inexhaustible fund of contentment, which sweetens every condition of life: though he appears to have nothing, yet he maketh himself rich, and possesseth all things, and out of the good treasures of his heart he can furnish himself with a continual feast.

What are external honours but empty titles and ridiculous pageantries, if there be no internal worth, and we are vile in our own sight? Or, if this world's goods flow in upon us with a full tide, and we are advanced like Haman above all the princes of the earth, yet, if our conscience, like Mordecai, bow not down, or do reverence to us, all these things will avail us nought.

Though ten thousand tongues should chant our praises, they would sound unharmonious in our ears, if conscience join not in the choir!

Wealth, strength, and prosperity are relative goods, and dependant upon the state of the mind; if this be sickly and poor, they will be like delicious dainties to a distempered person: they will offend the loathing stomach, and mock the vitiated palate.

But when the mind is lusty and strong, when it hungers and thirsts after righteousness, then it hath a true relish of things, and is filled with good: a good conscience is the salt which seasons all other

other blessings, and gives us a true taste or zest to them.

Lastly, to conclude this head; he that hath instructed himself in the knowledge of his duty, and acted according to this knowledge to the utmost of his power, hath done all that is required of him; and therefore God hath done all that is proper for him, he hath made the world for him, and set it in his heart; his conscience is as a solid rock, upon which his house being built, stands immoveable amidst the floods of affliction, and the storms of adversity.

Thus I have gone through what I proposed upon this subject, by shewing what conscience is, explaining the nature of it in general, and treating at large of the several kinds of it; I will therefore conclude with some few practical inferences, that have occurred to me from the foregoing heads.

It hath been already observed to you, that as conscience is a distinct principle from the understanding, and implicitly takes what that delivers to it, and makes it obligatory upon us, we ought to be extremely careful in forming our judgment, and take all possible pains to make it a sure guide to conscience; since mistakes of this kind are of a very fatal tendency, rendering the laws of our minds inconsistent with the laws of God, and making conscience give a sanction to folly, falsehood, and vice.

To this observation give me leave to subjoin, that since conscience, whether well or ill advised, continues to act in the same manner, trying us by the rule which it hath instituted, whatever that rule may be; and since it is difficult for any one under the influence of an erroneous conscience to distinguish it from a good conscience, we ought to be continually reviewing and re-examining our moral principles, for we have no other means of discovering the obliquity of our rule, and extricating ourselves from the most deplorable state of being under an obligation to do evil, or of being conscientiously wicked and devoutly impious: consider, likewise, that when men are the most sanguine of their being in the direct road to heaven, and have been taking more pains than is necessary for carrying them thither, what a dreadful disappointment it must be, to find themselves irrecoverably lost through their own ignorance,

and to have been labouring all their lifetime, only to get into the paradise of fools.

Again, secondly, Since our most gracious Creator hath vouchsafed to furnish us with the knowledge of the common social duties of life, and given a sure guide to conscience in these things, let us learn the value of this knowledge, and infer the necessity of its application to practice; and since God hath taken care that we shall not act without knowledge, let us take care that we do not act against it; and since he hath made the road of our duty smooth and easy, let us not throw any obstacles in our own way, or lay any temptations before us to draw us out of it, but let us ever embrace it as an unexceptionable maxim, that what is our duty must be our interest.

Thirdly, Let us give all diligence to get the knowledge of that part of our duty, which God hath only thought fit to lay the means of before us: consider that it is the proper employment and glory of a rational creature, to understand the will of his Creator, and to serve him in truth: be not afraid, therefore, of being overwise in this respect; here can be no excess; there is nothing which can better deserve your time and your pains, and this wisdom is more precious than rubies; all the things you can desire, are not to be compared with it; it will preserve you from the mazes of enthusiasm and superstition, and conduct you safely into the ways of righteousness, and into the midst of the paths of true religion and piety.

And, lastly, When conscience hath got wisdom for its guide, then follow it wherever it leads; there is no danger of being righteous overmuch, when you do what is right; when you have done all you can, you will do no more than what you ought to do; you may be too remiss, but you cannot be too intense in securing the testimony of your mind, or too busy in exercising yourself to have a conscience void of offence, when the voice of your mind is the voice of God, and you are really as perfect as you appear to yourself to be: other pleasures, like flowers, will fade upon the gathering, but the satisfaction of a good conscience glows in your bosom; it will yield a pleasant odour in all the seasons of life, and even blossom in the grave: it heightens the bloom of youth, invigorates manhood, is the crown

of glory to the hoary head, and in the last concluding scene, when you are drawing off the stage of life, the well grounded consciousness of having acted your part well, will attend you with its plaudit, and support you with the assurance of that most welcome eulogy of thy Master, *Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*

S E R M O N V.

On doing to Others, as we wish they should do unto us.

MATT. vii. 12.

All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.

PLAIN practical moral precepts, which inculcate our duty and promote the peace and welfare of mankind, are never unseasonable topics of discourse: and there is no one which can contribute more to these ends, than this in my text; for which reason, it hath been distinguished by the honourable title of the golden rule of life.

Without any farther preface or apology, therefore, I will treat of it in the following manner:

I. I will inquire into the nature and extent of this rule.

II. I will lay before you the uses and advantages of it; and,

III. I will exhort and recommend the practice of it.

First, then, this precept is founded on two self-evident principles of equity: viz. That all things should be treated agreeably to their nature; and that justice hath no respect of persons.

The universality of the first, renders this precept applicable to creatures of different species: for since it is manifest, that all naturally desire to be dealt with according to what they are, every one may learn from his own desires, that he ought to deal with others in the same manner.

The other principle seems to be confined to the individuals of the same species, and teaches us that all who partake of the same common nature, are entitled to the same common treatment: or, when all other circumstances remain the same, mere personal difference can make no alteration; and it matters not,

whether it is I, thou, or he, who is concerned; but what is just and fit for any one person to do or desire, is just and fit for all or any part of mankind in the same circumstances.

The words indeed of my text are more general, and command us to do not only what is just and fit, but all things whatsoever we could wish that men should do to us: but yet they must be understood in such a sense, as to be consistent with, and deducible from, the aforementioned maxims.

To preserve, therefore, this consistency and dependency, they must be considered, either as a precept of impartial justice, or as a rule for proving and correcting our desires.

If they are considered as a precept of impartial justice, the words, *whatsoever ye would that men should do to you*, must be taken in a limited sense; it must be the desire of reason, and not of will and passion: for a man may covet all the riches in the world, and wish his neighbour would give him his whole substance; yet it would be a very extraordinary injunction which obliged him, for that reason, to part with all he hath, and give it to his neighbour: this would be wrong, and impracticable; it would be wrong, because it would be going from one extreme into the other, and impoverishing himself and family; and it would be impracticable, because the excess of selfish desires, would necessarily prevent such social extravagancies; and, therefore, when these words are designed as a perfect rule of justice, they must be understood in this limited sense: *All things whatsoever*, that are fit and reasonable to desire from others, *do ye unto them.*

But, secondly, This precept may be considered as a commodious rule for proving and rectifying our desires; and then it may be taken in its utmost latitude: thus for example, *whatever ye would that men should do to you*, see whether you be willing, or whether it be proper to do the same to others; or try your desire, by supposing it another's, and examine whether it would be then right in you to comply with it; and if upon this scrutiny, you find it to be exorbitant, infer that the desire, whatsoever it be, is in itself excessive, and consequently ought to be lowered; and so repeat the trial, till your expectations and

com-

compliances coincide: then you may fairly conclude, that the desire is modest and natural, and the proper rule for your behaviour to others.

Or, in other words, bring your desires, whatever they be, to the balance of justice, and weigh them against your inclinations, to satisfy the same desires in another: if your desires preponderate, they are selfish and sordid, you are too much on your own side, and too little on your neighbour's; you must, therefore, take from this scale and add to the other, till they are brought to an equilibrium; then, as you will desire no more than you are willing to give, your self-love and special affections will be duly balanced.

These are the natural and obvious constructions of the words of my text.

But it is necessary to observe farther upon this last part, that there is a substitution of ourselves in the place of our neighbour, and of our neighbour in our place, implied in it.

And as these substitutions are subject to some restrictions, and should be made sometimes in an unlimited and sometimes in a partial manner, it will be necessary to describe and explain them.

It is an universal true proposition, and deducible from our first principle of justice, that what any beings may reasonably desire from any other, of whatever different kind they be, it would be just for them to do to those others, were they to change natures and conditions; but though this is universally true, it is not universally practicable; since we know very little of the constitution of other animals, we must have very imperfect ideas of their wants or powers, and therefore cannot readily put ourselves in their places. In one or two particular instances indeed, where the symptoms of their wants and feelings are so strong, that we can easily imagine something analogous to them in ourselves; there the supposition of what we should feel, were we in their condition, may be of use in directing us how to act by them; but in general, no complete rule of action can be formed from this kind of transposition: the change, therefore, of persons, more properly belongs to the human species; and as it is appropriated to it in my text, *whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you*, we shall consider them as de-

signed solely for promoting justice and equity among mankind.

From our participation of one common nature, we are either in the same circumstances with our brother, or can readily imagine ourselves in them; and from thence, can render ourselves at all times competent judges of equity in most cases that can happen between us.

We are in the same circumstances with our brother, in all things which are common and present to us both, or which immediately flow from the natural parity of mankind; and this natural parity is very extensive; for we are all placed in the same order of beings, are the same kind of rational and corporeal animals, and nearly resemble one another in our understanding, will, and affections: food, raiment, and habitation, with other externals, are the common necessities and conveniencies of human life; we are all subject to the same terms of mortality, and to the same kind of diseases and infirmities; we are fellow-members of society, mutually obliged to, and reciprocally dependent upon one another; and, lastly, our interest consists in the same things, and is to be pursued by the same courses.

From all which it follows, that one and all have the same laws of nature, and the same rules of conduct; in those circumstances therefore, where our wants and feelings are mutual and general, the desires of the individual are the desires of the whole species, and every man is the true representative of his neighbour, and the epitome of all mankind. Here the change of persons alone is sufficient; if we ask ourselves what we expect from others, the answer is general, and a full recital of our duty to them; or, if we inquire what we ought to do to them, we shall find an exact detail of our expectations from them, and their duty to us: thus, in all decisions of property, and in all cases where the relations are equal or co-ordinate, as between man and man, between fellow citizens, neighbours, or brethren, it is no matter who are the individuals, for there is no difference of circumstances; the claims and rules of equity are on both sides the same; and consequently will be so to us, whomsoever we personate.

But, besides these general circumstances which affect all who are in them
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at the same time, and in the same manner, or in which the relative and correlative are equally placed; there are circumstances which, though common to all, are not equally present to all, or which make one individual differ from another at the same time, or from himself at different times.

The general calamities incident to human nature, do not come to all in the same degree, or at the same time; some are visited with sickness, poverty, or adversity, when others enjoy health, plenty, or prosperity: there are, likewise, subordinate relations and various dependencies, resulting from natural or political institutions, from different occupations, ages, and unequal divisions of property: in all these diversities of circumstances, there are different rules of conduct or manners, peculiar to each of them; and the duties and expectations are not the same in one as they are in the other: in cases, therefore, where any of these unequal circumstances or subordinate relations are concerned, there must be a transposition of conditions, as well as of persons; and then what would appear just for us to do or desire upon the supposition of both these changes, that we are to desire or do in our present state: thus, for instance, whatever treatment any person, supposing he was son or servant, should think it reasonable to receive from his father or master, the same he is to give to his son or servant; and the son is to give that honour to his father, or the servant that obedience to his master, which he, supposing he was father or master, should think himself entitled to.

And again, whatever assistance we should judge reasonable to expect, were we in any distress, from persons in our present circumstances, that we ought to reach out to persons in the same distress; and whatever offices of humanity, were we in affluent circumstances, we should judge it incumbent upon us to do to persons in our present afflictions; to these we should confine our expectations, from persons in those circumstances.

These are the transpositions which are necessary to be made, for the due observation of this precept: the first is only a change of persons; the other a change of persons and conditions: but in both, the substitution is natural, and the inferences just: if we only change persons, what

was our duty or our expectations before, remain the same afterwards; or, if there be a change of persons and conditions, it is only of such conditions as are common to mankind, in which we may probably have been; or, if we have not, from the sameness of our nature, and from our observations upon our fellow-creatures, we are so well acquainted with them, that by imagining ourselves in them, we shall acquire a competent knowledge of the duties resulting from them.

Thus I have endeavoured to explain the nature and extent of the precept contained in my text.

I shall now proceed to the second thing proposed, viz. to lay before you the uses and advantages of it.

The first advantage that I shall mention is, that it is a most comprehensive rule, containing the whole duty of man to his neighbour, and is applicable to every occurrence in social life. All the commandments in the second table are comprized in this, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*, that is, thou shalt consider him as another self, and do to him as thou wouldst be done by.

Secondly, This precept is adapted to all capacities; every one knows what his expectations are from mankind, and from thence can readily inform himself what mankind expect from him; and as he is conscious of his natural parity with his fellow-creatures, and well-versed in the conditions of human life, he cannot but be sensible that he should do to them, as he would they should do to him: the justice of this rule lies level to the meanest understanding; it is acknowledged by all; nay, it is not only acknowledged, it is felt by all; for it is constantly accompanied with a sense of duty, or a consciousness of an obligation, which rises in us as it were by instinct, and seems to be the impulse of Providence, to quicken us to the observance of it. Ask the most illiterate person, whether he should not do to others as he would be done by, and he will not hesitate a moment in his answer; he is immediately struck with the truth, and feels himself strictly bound to conform to it: the most selfish and sordid wretch, likewise, who hath been prevailed upon by some lucrative views to act against this rule, is so conscious of its rectitude and universal approbation, that he dares not avow his own practices, and stands

stands convicted in his own mind of his iniquities : there cannot, therefore, be a clearer demonstration of the importance of this divine precept, than the preparation which our all-just Creator hath thought fit to make for the practice of it, by inspiring every breast with an intuitive knowledge of it, and placing such a strong bias upon the mind to draw us towards it, that we must offer much violence to our judgment and conscience before we can turn ourselves from it.

Hence, a third advantage of this rule is, That it is always at hand, we carry it about with us, it is hung up in our breasts, and there printed in such large characters, that he who runs may read them : what, therefore, Moses said of the commandments which he had that day given to the children of Israel, may with the strictest propriety be applied to it : viz. *It is not hid from thee, neither is it far off : It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it ? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it ? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.* (Deut. xxx. 11, 12, 13, 14.)

Again, fourthly, This is a rule which is in every man's power to practise ; it is easy for any one to know what he wills from his neighbour ; and there is no other difficulty, but in making himself as willing to do the same to him ; a ready mind is all that is required of us ; and who can hinder us from it ? Every man may be as honest and as just as he pleases ; here lies his strength ; he is subject to no compulsion or restraint from without, and where nature operates freely, he is disposed towards it from within, and nothing but inordinate passions or lusts can rob him of this liberty.

S E R M O N VI.

On doing to Others as we wish they should do unto us.

MATT. vii. 12.

All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them.

A FIFTH advantage of this rule is, viz. That it is in an especial manner cal-

culated for the suppression of the prejudices and partialities which self-interest is apt to raise within us. It is a general rule in all courts of equity, that no man should sit as a judge in his own cause, or be admitted as an evidence where he is a party concerned ; and the reason is, because self-love, the leading principle in human nature, frequently makes men partial to themselves : there is indeed an inseparable connection between justice and true interest, and were we always to pursue the one, we should never deviate from the other ; but there is an apparent or false, as well as a real and true interest ; that is, we may err in our judgment, and take the appearance for the reality ; but when we do err in this manner, then duty and apparent interest will be contrary to one another, and this interest will throw a mist between the understanding and the plainest truths ; and if the understanding should be strong enough to see them through it, yet interest will influence the will, and prejudice the mind against them ; should we but rarely make a wrong judgment of interest, or should this wrong judgment seldom interfere with our duty, its prevalency would be the less hurtful to us ; but the contrary, in both cases, too frequently happens : some through ignorance or inadvertency are imposed upon by the specious appearance of things, and through an error of their understanding make a false judgment of interest, whilst many suffer their passions to make this judgment for them ; and where avarice, ambition or pride are predominant, men will be partial to themselves ; and where envy, revenge or malice prevail, they will be prejudiced against others ; hence it comes to pass, that there are few capable of judging right in their own cause. The great use, therefore, of this precept in my text, is to remove these obstacles ; and by diverting our passions, and informing the understanding, to qualify us for being arbitrators between our neighbour and ourselves ; for which purpose, it takes us as it were out of ourselves, or separates our reason from our passions, by supposing our desires or actions to be another's : and interest and passion being thus detached from us, we view them with indifference, and judge of them as impartially, as if they were another's.

Though self-interest is too powerful to be resisted when we are actually attracted by

by it; yet, when its bias is taken off, and we are once set a going under the direction of justice, we cannot be easily turned out of its course: but by the application of this rule, this bias is taken off; all thoughts of interest are excluded; justice engrosses the attention, and a strong sense of it, with the deepest impressions, is raised in the mind; by which anticipation, or prior possession, we are rendered superior to the powers of interest or passion.

There is a remarkable instance of this superiority obtained by these means, recorded in the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel; which as an illustration of the use of this rule, as well as a confirmation of its powers, deserves your attention.

Nathan the prophet laid before David his brother, a case of the most iniquitous oppression, in the parable of the rich man's seizing the poor man's lamb: the king was greatly affected by the story, and was moved with such indignation against the oppressor, that he solemnly protested, *As the Lord liveth, the man who hath done this thing shall surely die.* Hitherto, he had not the least suspicion of any design upon himself; but so soon as the sense of this unparalleled violence had worked up the most determined resolution of punishing the offender, then the prophet turned the parable upon him, and immediately charges him with being this oppressor. David was strangely confounded at the unexpected application; but his ruling passions not being aware of the attack, had left his mind open, and suffered justice to pour its whole force into it, which had taken such ample possession of it, that it could not be dislodged; and the king was so struck with the consciousness of guilt, and the equity of his sentence, that he could not suppress the one, and was ashamed to retract the other. Had the prophet openly and directly charged him with the horrid crimes of murder and adultery, it is more than probable, that his pride and partiality would have spurned at the accusation, and enflamed him against the accuser: but by this innocent stratagem, he was drawn into a reflection of his crimes, and a condemnation of himself; the consequence of which was a sincere and hearty repentance.

By a similar application of this rule, our Saviour enforced the duties of humani-

ty upon the lawyer, when he asked him who was neighbour to him who fell among thieves, and was answered, he that shewed mercy unto him; for with this preparation, our Saviour urged the example of the good Samaritan with great advantage upon the lawyer, and could not fail of making a deep impression upon him, when he commanded him to go and do likewise; for the lawyer must from thence perceive, that there was no other relation between the Samaritan and the stranger who was robbed, wounded and left half dead, than between himself and any such like distressed person; that the Samaritan only bore a human heart to one who bore a human form, and did no more than what he himself and every man would desire to be done unto, and ought to do to all, in the like deplorable condition.

These are strong proofs of the influence of justice upon an unbiassed mind; and by the application of this rule, we deal with ourselves much after the same manner; for by abstracting ourselves from our actions, and setting them before us as if they were another's, and appealing to ourselves as to an indifferent person, we divert our partialities and prejudices, and our sense of duty and equity being perfectly unembarrassed, we make a fair judgment; and when we turn it upon ourselves, the passions not being able to recover themselves, justice keeps its seat, and obliges us to stand by its determinations.

But sixthly and lastly, The weight of prejudices and partialities which hang like a mill-stone about our necks, is not only taken off, and the judgment released from this grievous yoke, by the means of this precept; but in most cases there is more done by it: it sets our benevolent affections to work, it brings us to sympathize with our neighbour, and by our personating him, and placing ourselves in his circumstances, it retains self-love for his advocate, and brings it to plead his cause, by pressing us to the discharge of our duty to him, and the abatement of our demands from him.

But the power of this rule will be best exemplified, from a special application of it, to some general circumstances in which we may be placed, with respect to one another.

As, first, when my neighbour seems to be violently set against me, and to threaten

ten me with some injury, let me then apply this rule, by substituting myself in his place, and supposing myself to be the angry person; and upon this supposition, let me inquire, "Whether my neighbour hath not used me ill? Hath he not aspersed my character, and raised some false and scandalous stories to my prejudice? Hath he not abused my person or injured my property? Do not I do well, therefore, to be angry with him? Doth not prudence prescribe resentment, and self-defence call me to retaliate upon him for the prevention of any future insults."

Upon this scrutiny into my conduct towards my neighbour, when thus set at a distance from me, and supposed to be my neighbour's towards me, I shall probably find that I have given him just provocation, and that he hath good reason to be out of humour with me. Instead, therefore, of repeating the affront, and heaping coals upon his fire, I shall be led from this examination of my past conduct, into a sense and acknowledgment of my misbehaviour towards him; and shall endeavour to extinguish his enmity and recover his favour, by a proper submission and ready proffer of future good offices.

Or, at least, this substitution will have this good effect; by putting me to search narrowly into my own behaviour, it will prevent me from catching the flame from his anger; it will cool my resentment, and contribute, in some degree, towards my doing to my adversary, no more than what I should think right to be done to me.

Again, secondly, When I am going to be the aggressor, and my hand is lifted up against my neighbour, let me for a while suspend the stroke, let me change places with him, and consider myself as going to be assaulted by him; in this situation let me ask, "What reason he can have for using such violent means with me; have I offended him? If it be but once, surely that can never deserve such a severe return; nay, if I have offended him often, would it not be much better for him to repeat his forgiveness, and to try all fair means, before he proceeds to extremities? Resistance will harden me, but I shall be melted by forbearance; and I cannot continue to be long at variance with him, who is determined not to be at enmity with me."

But if no affront hath been offered, or provocation given, then let me catechise and take myself to task; "How should I like to have such a person for my neighbour, who, though I have never offended him, and though it be contrary both to his duty and his interest, will not live at peace with me, but take an unnatural pleasure in reeking his ill-nature or malice upon me? If I am injured in my person, my fortune, or my character, am I not touched in an extremely sensible part? Will it not provoke my keenest resentment, and turn me from a friend into a desperate enemy?"

"As I am a member, likewise, of the community, are not offences against me breaches of civil justice? Are not my private wrongs public injuries? And, do not I think the authors of them to be the pests of society, and highly punishable by the laws of God and man?"

But, doth the difference of persons alter the case? Is not my neighbour's fortune, his person, or his character, as dear to him as mine can be to me? Hath he not the same exquisitely tender feelings with myself? And is there not the same provocation to resentment? Do not I violate the same laws of justice? And is not the peace of society as much endangered by my contentions as my neighbours? And am I not as much obnoxious to the same human and divine penalties?

Such transpositions and interrogatories as these, cannot fail of disarming my ill-will against my neighbour, and raising in me a just sense of my obligations to peace and amity.

But, thirdly, When my necessities or distresses call up my expectations, and make me importunate for assistance from my neighbour; then let me apply this rule, and suppose myself in his circumstances; let me assume his character, and enter into his part as if I was to act in it; let me ask myself upon this change, what abilities I then have? What relation do I bear to a certain person? Have I not nearer friends, and more necessitous dependents, who have a better claim to my services? And would it not be depriving them of my charity to bestow it upon others?"

By these, and such like inquiries, we shall confront our own desires; and by thus informing ourselves what is reasonable for our neighbour to give, we shall learn

learn what is proper for us to expect, and shall judge candidly of him.

Fourthly and lastly, When my brother is labouring under any fore affliction or distress, let me set the glass before me, and behold myself struggling under the same calamity. "How plainly then do I perceive the duties of humanity, and my title to the assistance of my fellow-creatures? How strongly are these obligations imprinted upon my mind? Do not I wonder how any one can be so insensible of my miseries, as to pass by me unconcerned? How welcome is any friendly relief? How shall I bless the hand from whence it comes; and with the warmest gratitude adore my benefactor?"

But is not my brother the same miserable spectacle in those circumstances that I supposed myself to be? Do not I see him agonizing under the same pains, and languishing in the same helpless manner? Are not his calls for assistance as loud, and his title to it as good as mine? Doth not the balm that is poured into his wounds alluage his pains as much as it doth mine? And doth not relief come as seasonable to him, and meet with the same cordial reception? And, lastly, do not I see the heart of the succoured, like my own, dancing for joy, and the blessing of him that was ready to perish poured forth as fervently upon his deliverer?

Hence, by drawing a picture of our brother from ourselves, and ourselves from our brother, and viewing them in the same light, and comparing them together, we learn to forgive an enemy, to forbear from injuries, to moderate our expectations in distresses, and to commiserate the afflicted.

Thus I have attempted to set before you some of the general uses that are to be made of this divine precept, and the advantages that will accrue to us from the application of it.

It remains, therefore, in the last place, to exhort and recommend the practice of it; but I have greatly anticipated this part of my discourse; the explication of it, and the displaying of its uses and advantages, have almost rendered any other recommendation unnecessary.

For what more powerful motives can there be urged for the practice of it, than that it is founded upon the first principles of equity and truth; that it is level to all capacities; that we cannot be deceived

by it; that we are certain we are in the right when we act by it; and that our reason immediately assents; our conscience presses us to it; and it hath the seal of universal approbation.

Consider, then, that we have no excuse for not practising it.

We cannot plead ignorance, because common sense suggests it to us, and the world is continually appealing to and reminding us of it; when we see others do wrong, and especially to ourselves, do not we immediately fly to this rule? Do not we prescribe the application of it to them, as the most effectual means to convince them of their iniquity? Do not we bid them reflect how they would be dealt by, and whether their treatment of us is such as they would expect from us? But if we are so ready to dictate it to others, why are we not as forward to recommend it to ourselves? If we are sensible that it is the best means for curbing our neighbour's extravagancies, we cannot but know that it will be as useful in checking our own.

We cannot plead inability to put this rule into practice; we know what we desire from others; and there is no difficulty in putting ourselves in another's place, and learning what his desires are from us; from hence, it is easy to balance our desires, and to act by them when they are so balanced: had our task been ever so difficult, ought we not to have done our utmost towards the performance of it? How much more ready then ought we to be, when only this compendious rule is set before us; and nothing more is required of us, than to regulate our practice by it.

But there is no topic, by which this rule can be urged with greater advantage, than that of its removing the prejudices and partialities which a false judgment of interest or inordinate passion creates, and converting self-love into an advocate for our neighbour; there cannot be a stronger proof of the weakness and depravity of human nature, than the prepossessions which blind the understanding, and bias the will, in the plainest matters of justice and duty: how frequently are men imposed upon by the appearances of interest; and how powerful are its influences upon us? Daily experience and observation afford us too many examples of it: now the best, and perhaps the only effectual prevention of this influence, is the application of this rule: a quick sense
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of justice, and strong consciousness of duty, are the arms with which Providence hath arrayed us, to defend ourselves against the formidable adversaries, false interest and passion: it is incumbent upon us, therefore, to be well versed in the use of them; for which end, we should be continually exercising ourselves with them; we should always have them at hand, and lie under them; that, when we are attacked by these enemies, we may not be off our guard, or inexpert in the using of them. Though no man will dispute the equity of this precept, yet, when our attention is engrossed by the passions or views of interest, we may not immediately recollect it; we should, therefore, do by it as the Israelites did by their law; we should meditate upon it when we lie down, and when we rise up; we should make it the daily subject of our conversation; we should wear it about our necks, and be continually renewing the characters of it upon our hearts, that it may be always uppermost in our thoughts, and offer itself to us upon every emergency.

This substitution of ourselves into the place of our neighbour, and our personating his character, are of such general use, that St. Paul thought fit to recommend it even to those whom we may reasonably presume were least influenced by passion,

and in things where self interest seemed to be least concerned: *Brethren*, says he to the Galatians, *if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye that are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted*: he charges them to look into themselves, and reflect upon their own frailties, and then make the same allowances for another's, as they would have made for their own: and let him sling the first stone at his offending brother, who, upon a thorough examination of his own heart, stands acquitted by his conscience of all offence.

But, to conclude: Since the precept in my text hath all the signs of being a law of nature, or rather of the God of nature, by being founded upon the first principles of equity; by being deeply imprinted upon the human mind, and adapted to all capacities and powers; since it is a doctrine of revelation, contained in the law and the prophets, and enjoined in the gospel; if then as men ye have any love for justice, or any regard for your duty to your Maker; or, if as Christians ye hold yourselves bound by a law which our Saviour came to fulfil, and which he hath expressly commanded; you will make it your principal care *to do to all men as ye would they should do to you*.

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S E C T I O N XIV.

FROM THE

SERMONS of JOHN LANGHORNE, D. D.

RECTOR of BLAGDON in SOMERSETSHIRE.

S E R M O N I.

The Advantages of Religious Meditation.

GENESIS, xxiv. 63.

Isaac went out to meditate in the field, at the eventide.

IN the days of early innocence, and patriarchal simplicity, nature had a kind of dominion in the heart of man which she seems now, in a great measure, to have lost. While he was attentive only to the gratification of real wants, and found them supplied by her common bounty, he could not fail to love so kind a benefactress.

But through the refining arts of society this simple attachment to nature has been destroyed. When artificial wants were discovered, which she alone was no longer able to gratify, man withdrew his affection from her, and art and avarice took place of love and simplicity.

This change is not only to be lamented, as productive of miseries which man was not made to suffer, but as destructive of that pure and reasonable devotion, which the love of nature was intended to inspire.

Was it not intended that this love should lead us to the adoration of God? Why then are his works so formed for admiration and delight? Why then such order, such beauty, such proportion in every part of the creation? Why is the eye delighted with variety of colouring, and why are light and shade so admirably mingled to produce that variety? Why are our senses affected by fragrance or beauty, by symmetry or magnificence? Why do we rejoice to behold the glories of a

rising, or a setting sun? and why do we feel an awful kind of pleasure, when we behold the expanse of heaven covered with innumerable stars?—The reason is obvious: the God of nature formed our senses to be affected by these objects, that, under the influence of love and admiration, we might learn to adore the wisdom that created them.

Since then the contemplation of the visible works of Providence seems to have been intended as a motive to rational devotion, we should do well to allot some time for exercises of this nature, and accompany the patriarch at eventide to meditate in the field.

To indulge this contemplative disposition must be more immediately necessary for those whose lives roll in the circle of fashionable dissipation; who seem to think that the only end of their being is amusement, and have not the least idea of those indispensable duties, by which they are bound either as sociable, or as dependent creatures.

Did they sometimes meditate on the works of eternal wisdom, and soberly consider the end of their existence, would they conclude it to be the proper employment of a rational creature to divide its life between dress and dancing, between sleep and play—to fly from one amusement to another, while art has any new expedient to flatter luxury, and while the invention of poverty can administer to the wants of wealth?

Did they ever contemplate the wisdom of that Being who gave them life, could they suppose that life to be given in vain? Could they conclude that a soul which can conceive the perfections of its Creator, and which bears a shadow of those perfections in itself, should be
created

created for no nobler purpose than an insect—to flutter a while in the sunshine of festivity, and be no more?

Did they suspend the pursuit of pleasure to consider the social duties of man, would they suppose that the world was furnished only for their particular entertainment; and that they had no other connections with, or engagements to their fellow-creatures, than as they were necessary to their ease or amusement; to contribute to their luxury, or gratify their pride? Would they not soon be convinced that those who have the greatest share of this world's goods are but more distinguished servants of the community; and the greater the power that has been committed to them, the more laborious must be their service, and the more extensive their charge?

Did they reflect on the duties of a dependent creature, would they not perceive the strong obligations which must bind a created being to the author of its existence? Would they not conclude that, if acts of worship are the only offerings we are capable of making our supreme Creator, it is at least our duty not to neglect those—But when they were informed that the particular acts of obedience which God expected from them in return for their creation and preservation, were to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with respect to him—would they not, in those precepts, be struck with a general idea of their duty both religious and social, and be convinced that the latter was founded on the former?

Such reflections as these are certainly proper for beings that are born to be accountable for the life that is lent them: but, how seldom do we yield admission to such reflections as these!—The world, the insinuating world has the art of engrossing our attention—Its objects still prevail, however insignificant; nor is it sufficient that we have been once deceived: the cheat is still practised upon us; we are again disappointed, yet we embrace it again.

It is, therefore, convenient that we should sometimes retire from a scene of danger and dissipation—retire with Isaac into the field, and meditate.

Man, indeed, was not made for perpetual solitude—His powers, his dependencies, all declare against it; but occasionally to leave the business and the

tumult of society—to retire into himself, and to commune with his own heart, whether, with the prophet in his chamber, or with the patriarch in the field, is not only expedient, but even necessary.

There is scarce any task so unwelcome to us as the review of our own minds, and hence it is that we are, in general, so little acquainted with the state of them. Our inclinations change insensibly, and the heart takes a different bias by imperceptible degrees; inasmuch that when we come to compare our present conduct with what was our manner of life a few years ago, we are surprized to observe the difference, because we attended not to the progressive change of our sentiments and dispositions.

For this reason, we ought, by frequent meditation, to examine the state of our minds, to inquire how we stand affected to the great branches of our duty, by placing them respectively in view; but more particularly to make it our question, whether we are sensible of that pious gratitude to our Creator, which is the first and best foundation of religious obedience.

Enquiries these are that demand the hour of privacy and recollection, when the passions are all obedient to the understanding, and even self-interest and self-love submit to the search of truth.

Then let us summon our hearts to their trial, when their specious advocates are at a distance; when they can derive no confidence from the flattering presence of worldly objects, and are no longer hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

For this, let me once more observe that, retirement is the proper scene. The world is an enemy that is not to be subdued, but by frequent retreats; we must contend with it as the Parthians of old did with their adversaries, and fly, while we maintain the fight.

But in all our religious meditations there is one circumstance which we ought never to forget, and that is the deceitfulness of the heart. However closely or impartially we examine it; we shall hardly bring it to an open or an ingenuous confession. It has still some evasion, some apology, some palliating circumstance for every charge that is brought against it. If we place its deformities before it, it has the art of shifting the scene, and of displaying its supposed per-

fections in their stead. If we charge it with some particular vice, or foible, it derives encouragement from comparison, and instead of acknowledging and amending its own faults, it sets itself at ease by considering the imperfections of others.

For this evil there is no better remedy than that which the Psalmist has recourse to, when he implores the assistance of that Being, who is properly called the *Searcher of hearts*. *The righteous God, says he, proveth the heart—His eyelids try the children of men—Examine me, O Lord, and prove me: try my reins, and my heart. Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O cleanse thou me from my secret faults.*

The author of these petitions was, exclusive of his inspired knowledge, by no means a stranger to the human heart. He had experienced its treachery: he knew its propensity to error, to folly and to vice. He knew, that an enemy concealed under the mask of friendship was of all others the most dangerous, and he considered his own heart as such. He was sensible that in this respect too he was liable to be betrayed by his own familiar friend, with whom he had likewise taken sweet counsel.

It is from the strongest convictions, therefore, that he applies to a superior power, and prays for deliverance from an enemy so insidious, and so near. Such, under the same circumstances, should be the conduct of every Christian. *If our hearts condemn us not, yet let us pray for a more perfect knowledge of, and command over them, to that Being, who is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things.*

This will not only be the most effectual, but the safest method of self-examination; for when, with all becoming humility, we implore the assistance of God in that duty, we have nothing further to fear from the event of it, because we have done whatever was in our own power towards it.

These are reflections which naturally arose upon the subject of religious meditation. Let us now turn our eyes a moment on the contemplative Patriarch. He *went out*, we are told, *to meditate in the field at the eventide*. This was at the most critical juncture of his life; for he was now in expectation that the divine promise would soon be fulfilled in a circumstance of no less consequence than that of giving him a wife, in whose off-

spring all the generations of the earth were to be blessed.

With such glorious and exalted views, it was natural for him to retire, and indulge his thoughts in private. Great joys, like great sorrows, love to be alone, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with them. It is, therefore, with the greatest propriety that the historian represents Isaac upon this occasion as retiring into the field for meditation.

The probable subject of his reflections was nothing less than the accomplishment of the divine promise—a subject, in every respect, the noblest, and the most delightful, that the human mind is capable of contemplating! To the Patriarch it must have been particularly so upon this occasion, for while he was yet meditating on those promises, he beheld them accomplished.

He lifted up his eyes and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming.

And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel.

For she had said unto the servant, what man is this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant had said, it is my master.

As it will not be a far-fetched, so I hope it will not altogether be an useless exhortation, if I recommend it to you, while you walk through the field of this life, like the Patriarch, to make the promises of God the subject of your meditation. You have, you will say, no personal or particular promises, such as the son of Abraham was favoured with. That may be true—but how much greater, how much more glorious are your expectations than his? His were confined merely to the long succession of an earthly posterity, but you look up to an inheritance of immortality, to an house not made with hands, incorruptible in the heavens. These magnificent promises you have from the same gracious Power, in whom the Patriarch trusted and was not deceived; whose hand is not shortened that it cannot save, and part of whose glorious character it is, that he keepeth his promise for ever.

Through every period of this uncertain life let us constantly meditate on the eternal promises. The eventide will soon come, when, like Isaac, we shall see them accomplished—when we shall meet that everlasting love which first brought us into this state of being, and shall finally remove

remove us from it. Let this be our strong consolation, *who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us; which hope we have as an anchor of our souls, steadfast and immovable.* This hope it was that supported our fellow-Christians in all the painful conflicts of their spiritual warfare. And it is this that must afford us the only reasonable consolation under every distressful or discouraging event.

Why art thou so full of heaviness, O my soul! And why art thou so disquieted within me? Trust in God. Repose on his infallible word, his immutable promises; and in every various situation of life the eternal Providence shall never fail thee nor forsake thee. Whether thou art in the city, or whether thou art in the field, blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field.

S E R M O N II.

Paraphrase and Reflections on the Story of Joseph.

GEN. xlv. 4.

I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.

THERE is no story in the sacred writings in which the heart has so much to do as that of Joseph. Pride, envy, surprize, affection, fear, hope, and joy, have their several turns, and, as we read, strike upon the attention, or excite the passions.

Joseph was one of the younger children of Jacob, and indulged with those particular forbearances and endearments, which are always due to the tenderest years. These little distinctions of his father's love were, however, the source of many miseries to him; and they leave an useful lesson to all parents, to beware lest they sow the seeds of jealousy in the hearts of brothers.

Envious of Joseph's superior favour and privileges, his brethren had long looked upon him with disgust, till, at last, an unfortunate circumstance turned their jealousy into rancour. The innocent and unwary youth inadvertently told them, that, in a dream, he beheld their sheaves making obeisance to his. "What! my officious favourite, surely this is too much: your smooth tales, and your prattling caresses, have caught the heart and

the ear of your unthinking father; but to grow vain upon your distinction, young man! to add insult to treachery! not contented with robbing your brethren of a father's favour, would you also deprive them of their liberty? And do you expect that those who are your superiors by birth and age, should bow like slaves to you?"

How specious are such reproaches as these, and what an air of equity and reason do they assume. It is the peculiar misfortune of innocence, that it makes us too inattentive to the consequences of our common actions: and while we never suspect that the world has any other designs or sentiments than such as pass in our own breasts, we find that the most trivial circumstances of our conduct, many times, become a snare to us. Unhappy Joseph! Poor unexperienced boy! Little didst thou think that the innocent recital of thy dream should draw upon thee so much obloquy, so much envy! Behold! Unapprehensive of the rage that was already kindled against him, he unwarily lets fall another circumstance which blows it up to the utmost fury. I dreamed, says he (with the same undesigning innocence), behold! I have had one dream more; and *the sun, the moon, and eleven stars, did reverence to me.*

Envy, when inflamed to the utmost, vents not itself in idle reproaches, but plots, in horrid silence, the ruin of its object.

The unnatural brethren now no longer threatened or reviled; but at once determined to sacrifice a life so obnoxious to their pride. The scene of this shocking resolution was the field of Dothan, where they were keeping sheep, a scene of pastoral simplicity, but not of pastoral innocence. There Joseph came to seek his brethren. Tell me, said the affectionate youth to a stranger in the way, hast thou seen my brethren? Behold I am wandering in these lonely fields to seek them; tell me, I pray thee, where they keep their sheep. They have left the fields of Schechem, replied the stranger, and are gone to Dothan; there wilt thou find them.

Probably this was some more retired place, some darker and remoter desert, in which they chose to execute their horrid purpose.

"He comes, they cried, he comes. Behold the dreamer! Now vain boy! Thou shalt now suffer for thy pride, thy

insolence, and those coaxing arts thou hast made use of to seduce the ear of thy father; that ear is now too far off to hear thy complaints, neither shall they abuse it any more. Come, let us slay him, and throw him into a pit: we shall say some wild beast hath devoured him."

Thus had the unhappy youth fallen a sacrifice to the envy and the jealousy of his cruel brethren; but Reuben, the generous, the amiable Reuben, interposed.

"Hold, rash men! unnatural and unfeeling brothers! Let us not in one thoughtless moment throw away the peace and innocence of our whole lives. Good God! how am I astonished at the horror of your resolution! For the sake of heaven, before your hands are embued in the blood of innocence, a brother's blood! I intreat you, consider—what is the life you are about to take away? A life derived from the same fountain with your own, fed from the same breast, and cherished by the same affection! But this is not all: you will plunge your impious daggers in the author of your being; you will kill your venerable father; his children will kill their father. No matter how you may relate the horrid tale; no matter, if his child be slain, whether by savage beasts, or by savage brothers; for he will weep, poor man! he will tear his grey hairs, and beat his hoary bosom. And are you yet determined? will you pierce your father's heart, through the heart of his child? will you, indeed, fill his aged eyes with tears? and bring down his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave? But, if you are determined, let us not, at least, stain our hands with his blood. Let us rather *cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness*, and leave him." *This, he said*, continues the sacred writer, *that he might deliver him out of their hands, and restore him to his father*. But here the generous Reuben was disappointed. He appears to have left his brethren on some occasion or other, and they took the opportunity to sell Joseph to some travelling merchants. For afterwards, when Reuben returned unto the pit, behold he was not in the pit, and he rent his clothes; and returned to his brethren, and said, *the child is not yonder, and I, whither shall I go!* Poor youth! what anguish must his tender heart have felt, when he found his brother taken away, and was ignorant of his fate! No doubt he gave way to all the violence of affectionate

grief; for he rent his clothes, crying, "The child is not yonder; and I, whither shall I go? My dear, poor murdered brother! where shall I go to weep over thy lifeless body, to embrace thy cold limbs, and close thy eyes!" How affecting is this brotherly sorrow! But behold a more distressful scene! The venerable patriarch! an aged and affectionate father mourning for the untimely death of a beloved child! How pitiable is such sorrow as this! our hearts bleed within us while we think of it. "Yes (complains the father to his ungracious children), I perceive too well the cause of my child's death. Some evil beast hath devoured him. Yes, my child, this was thy little coat of divers colours which thy mother's fondness provided—Ah! little did she think that it should be torn by the bloody teeth of a savage! This coat thy sorrowful brothers found in the desert, all rent and mangled, and bloody as it is. Joseph is no more. I will go down into the grave, to my son in mourning. There, only, my heart can forget its sorrows, and my aged eyes shall weep no longer."

Let us now change our pity for a moment into indignation.

It is observable that vice destroys all traces of humanity in the heart.

These inhuman brethren were not in the least concerned for the misery of their father, provided that their story, however shocking to him, might effectually cover their own wicked actions. But the historian tells us they rose up to comfort him. O shameless insult! insufferable mockery! Ye abandoned hypocrites! How durst you behold the sacred sorrows of your venerable father? Ye! did ye offer your vile dissembled condolence! did ye force the unnatural tear, and put on the appearance of pity! Heaven and earth! can man be so deliberately base?

But enough of this disagreeable part of the story; let us hasten forward to a more pleasing scene; and behold the lamented Joseph, after the space of about twenty years, in possession of the highest honours of the most opulent kingdom in the world.

Inspired by the spirit of immortal wisdom, from the condition of a slave, he became the first minister of one of the first princes upon earth. The keys of power were intrusted to him, and the gardens of Egypt yielded their treasure into his hand. He whose providence directs the events of nature, who lifteth the poor from

his obscurity, that he may set him with princes, displayed in this instance, in a most extraordinary manner, his gracious purposes in behalf of suffering innocence. Suffer me to pass over some disagreeable circumstances that happened to Joseph, when in Egypt, the trial of his virtue, and his unjust imprisonment; perhaps the Almighty Providence might suffer these accidents as the means of his future promotion.

However that might be, it is certain that his God *took him from prison and from judgment, that he made him see his seed, and prolong his days, and that the divine pleasure prospered in his hand.*

But behold! the same over-ruling power, who led him safe to glory through so many perils, is now determined that he shall again see his brethren.

Before I proceed further upon this event, I beg leave to give you some caution against a common error concerning the ways of God to man. It is very natural to conclude that the Almighty previously appointed all these circumstances, in order to bring about the event; that Joseph's brethren were fatally inspired with rancour against him, that they might sell him into Egypt; and that a general famine was the necessary and fore-appointed means of their seeing him there. On which I shall observe, in one word, "that God cannot be the author of evil," but that to bring good out of evil, is consistent both with his gracious disposition, and with his moral government of the world.

I will now lead you, without further delay, to a very affecting scene, to the meeting of Joseph and his brethren.

At first, says the sacred writer, though he knew them, yet he spake roughly to them; and said, *Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.* It appears to me, that, as Benjamin was not with his brethren, Joseph suspected that the youngest had shared the fate intended for himself; and that, through envy, they had slain their brother. Else, why, before he would discover himself to them, should he so much insist upon seeing Benjamin? He does absolutely insist upon seeing him, and retains Simeon as a pledge for his appearance.

But ah! How shall they prevail upon their aged father to part with Benjamin? his youngest, his beloved Benjamin! *What!* cried the venerable man, *would*

ye rob me of this child too? Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away. All these things are against me.

The generous Reuben again interposed; *Slay my two sons, if I bring him not unto thee; deliver him into my hand, and I will bring him to thee again.* My son shall not go down, replied the impatient father; *his brother is dead; and if death too should befall him in the way, ye shall bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.*

Necessity, however, stronger than all human affections, prevailed where other arguments were ineffectual. The brethren are again sent to buy food, and the fond father gives up his darling child, the last hope and comfort of his age.

But what language shall paint the inexpressible affection of Joseph, upon the sight of Benjamin? When he saw him, his heart swelled within him, the tears of fondness sprung into his eyes, and he retired to indulge them.

Do not you hear this affectionate brother thus giving a loose to the fulness of his heart? "Great God of Jacob! what a scene hast thou brought before me! my eyes have again beheld my brethren, strangers to me more than twenty years! Dear, unhappy men! indeed my heart forgives you—How do I long to discover myself to you, but that you would die with shame at the sight of your injured brother. None of you could rejoice at such a discovery, save Benjamin—he, amiable innocence! he entered not into your horrid conspiracy. But I must think of some means to free you from the disagreeable impressions of shame, when I make myself known to you; and endeavour to heighten your joy on that occasion, by first alarming your fears."

Such, probably, was the generous design of Joseph in his scheme for retaining Benjamin; such certainly was the effect that it had, when under the terrible apprehension of returning to their incensed father, with an account that they had left his youngest child a bond-slave, they were struck with this important, this astonishing discovery—*I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.*

I shall not dwell upon this scene. It is too great for description—but the heart of every brother and every father may conceive it.

Most of the instructive reflections that arise from this affecting story, I have in-

terwoven with the thread of it. But you will accept of one general observation from the whole.

Whatever distressful circumstances may befall you, always remember that you are under the eye of a benevolent and almighty Providence, who is able to bring good out of evil, and who is continually concerned for the happiness of his creatures. From this conviction, you will endeavour to engage his particular regard, by the exercise of that virtue he is most in love with.

Be kindly affectioned one to another.

S E R M O N III.

Affection, Compassion, and Civility recommended.

I PET. iii. 8.

Love as brethren ; be pitiful, be courteous.

THAT charitable disposition which Christianity recommends as its first principle, comprehends all the peculiar graces and virtues that distinguish the disciples of Jesus.

Hence, the Apostle gives it the preference to all other faculties and powers. The mind might be enlightened with the visions of prophecy—The tongue might be informed with every human language—The laws of nature might be inverted at the command of a created being, and health and life conferred by man that is born to die : but these powers, as they were superior to his capacity, could add nothing to his moral excellence ; and, therefore, one portion of charity was greater than these.

It does not appear that the Apostles looked upon this as any particular species of virtue, that could be described by some peculiar, or uniform mode of operation : they must have considered it as a general temper, or disposition of the soul, that gave its colour and principle to every moral action.

This temper was formed by the genius and spirit of Christianity, improved by that divine grace, which was the privilege of the new religion. But why am I attempting a description of charity, which is so admirably described by its effects in the Epistle to the Corinthians ? To that I shall refer you, and confine myself to the consideration of those virtues that flow

from it, mentioned in the text—*Love as brethren : be pitiful : be courteous.*

I. It must always be allowed by the advocates of natural religion, that the precepts of Christianity make the best system of morality in the world. Numberless graces were suggested by the divine Spirit, which would never have been thought of in a mere natural state : none of these is more frequently inculcated than brotherly love ; nay, so indispensable was this duty, that it was made the test of every convert's pretensions, and the last argument of the love of God. *By this we know that ye are of God, if ye have love one to another.*

And, indeed, what better proof could there be of a principle of grace in the heart than this love of the brethren ? What better indication that they were actuated by the spirit of him who is love itself ? What could more effectually preserve the infant church from the rending fury of sects and schisms, than this harmony of affections, this union of minds ? So strictly requisite, then, that it was made the test of the true Christian.

But was it necessary, in the early state of Christianity, and is it not equally so now ? Stands not our holy church in need of the spirit of unanimity and love, when we see the bigot zeal of popery so industrious on the one hand, and the delusions of fanaticism so successful on the other ? Were ever the sacred connections of mutual amity more necessary in the church of England than at the present time ? In what parish, nay, in what village, have not some of her wavering members been deceived by the insinuations of the puritan or the bigot ? Have not we seen the labours of these men too successful in creating prejudice and divisions ? And is not this in some measure owing to the want of brotherly affection, the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace ? Were this more effectually cultivated among us, the good shepherd would see fewer stragglers from his fold.

So necessary is this principle of uniting love in the support of religion ; nor is it less valuable, or less needful in social life. Mutual affection is not only the best proof of piety, and the principal security from innovations in religion, but the purest source of social duties, and the firmest foundation of moral justice.

Were every man to consider himself as deriving his existence from one common parent,

parent, as connected to the whole species by an eternal relation, and, in consequence of this reflection, to behave to every fellow-creature as a brother, would not the second great commandment of the law be most emphatically fulfilled? And would it not, at the same time, most effectually promote the welfare of society? Would not the life and property of every individual be infinitely the most secure, when, from the law of nature, as well as of nations, from the connections of relation, as well as the obligations of moral rectitude, he could claim the assistance and regard of others?

To love as brethren, must, in the consequence, be to act as brethren—No person of humanity would willingly see him who derived his being from the same parents, the partner of the same womb, whom the same affections nursed, for whom the same care provided, in misery or distress. The voice of nature would plead for the wretched, and demand the relief and assistance of a brother. Should the same voice point out every individual to our regard, when would justice bewail the violation of her laws, or misery complain without assistance and redress? Should we consider every fellow-creature as relatively, though not absolutely, a brother, how happy must be the effect of such a conclusion! What peace and harmony would run through the system of life! How delightful must be the effect of universal benevolence! Free from the injuries of oppression and the insolence of pride, the malignity of envy and the extortion of avarice, how very different would be the state of society! Should the smiles of affection dwell on every aspect, this life should no longer be called the valley of mourning! Should brotherly love glow in every breast, how would it awake every tender passion! how ready would pity be to weep over distress, and pay the sympathizing tear to pain and misery!

II. If we love as brethren, we shall, of consequence, be pitiful. Let stoic pride shut up the bowels of mercy, and stop the sluices of compassion: a Christian will not be ashamed of the tender sensations of humanity, to mourn with those that mourn, and weep with those that weep—*Jesus wept*—The tear that was shed over the sorrows of Jerusalem, the prophetic voice of sympathy that mourned its approaching ruin, give us a right to indulge a sensibility of pity, and teach us

that such affections are not unwelcome to Heaven.

Nay, we are commanded, as well by the Author of our salvation as his Apostles, to be full of compassion: it is a duty enjoined by religion, as incumbent on humanity: it is this that directs the hand of charity to relieve, and points out to benevolence the objects of assistance. Without this, charity is ostentation, and munificence hypocrisy.

Pity brings the mind into an humble frame, and makes it susceptible of the impressions of piety and gratitude to the great preserver of men; when the misfortunes of humanity make us sensible of our weakness, and of our dependance on that being who alone is almighty.

The excellence of this affection is demonstrable, in that it is always found in the finest dispositions. If pride fill the breast with obstinacy and arrogance, we may be assured that pity dwells not there. If avarice turn the ear from the complaints of poverty, we may naturally conclude that pity dwells not there.

He whose heart is depraved by the indulgence of irregular appetites, or contracted by unsocial vices, is rarely sensible of the emotions of compassion. It is almost peculiarly the growth of the humble, heavenly mind, that is full of benevolence, tenderness, and humanity. If we look into the lives of those who have been most renowned for their piety, I believe we shall find few who have not left behind them some extraordinary instances, the effects of this generous sympathy.

Such, indeed, is the excellence of a compassionate temper, that perhaps there never was a good man, who was not in a great degree distinguished by it.

Its usefulness to society cannot be disputed: if, as we have observed, it be the source of charity; if it directs us to the relief of misery, and the consolation of distress; if it be feet to the lame, or eyes to the blind; if its words uphold those that are falling, and if it strengthen the feeble knees—its utility is confessed; and it is, with indisputable propriety, enjoined by the law of religion.

III. Thus necessary and thus useful is that precept of the Apostle, be pitiful. Nor less useful, or less necessary perhaps is that which immediately follows it, and commands us to be courteous—that is, to behave with civility and complaisance to all orders of men; and to pay that de-

ference to every man which his station requires. If it were considered how much the peace of society is preserved by the forms of what we call good breeding, they would not hastily be neglected, nor left as useless or superfluous. Every one is pleased to be treated with the appearance of respect, and no prudent man would therefore refuse to pay it. If pleasure can be communicated at so cheap a rate, no good natured person would neglect the means. Whatever contributes to the good understanding, and mutual respect of social life, ought not by any means to be rejected. There is enough of malignity in human nature to disorder the peace and commerce of mankind, without creating coldness by a studied negligence of civility, or a rude or careless, or perhaps affected contempt of the established and expected forms of politeness. We should endeavour, as much as possible, to cherish the principle of social benevolence, and, as St. Paul says, be in some measure *all things to all men*. Whatever may advance the happiness or satisfaction of our neighbour, Christian charity obliges us to offer: whatever would discompose or disgust him, we ought, in justice, to avoid, as we might easily conclude it would be unwelcome to ourselves. To encourage and exhort to respect and amity; to engage mankind in mutual good offices, and to *preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace*, seems to have been the view of the Apostle, when he enjoined us to *love as brethren; to be pitiful, and to be courteous*.

S E R M O N IV.

The Condition of Poverty better than that of Riches abused.

ECCLES. iv. 6.

Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit.

AMONG the numbers that disquiet themselves in vain, there are none farther from the road of happiness than those who toil insatiably for the acquisition of riches. A mind that has this bias can seldom be at ease; for the goods of fortune are in a state of perpetual fluctuation, and that man must know but little repose, who rests his hopes on what chance may take away.

Certainly avarice is a species of mad-

ness; if madness be nothing more than an absence, or a suspension of reason. For who can be more destitute of reason than he who chooses the evil and shuns the good? Yet such is the conduct of the man who hath set his heart on the increase of riches. In a life whose days are few and evil, he is hourly adding to that evil by an unnecessary anxiety to make provision for a life that should have many days. The best privilege of wealth would be the enjoyment of quiet, but he forfeits that quiet for the acquisition of more. His desires are not bounded by the wants of nature, or the decent conveniences of life; money is the object of his affections; and while he labours to acquire it, the use of it is forgot.

But though there is no infatuation that takes hold of the human mind, more unaccountably ridiculous than this inordinate love of wealth, it is certain that no vice or folly whatever is more difficult to subdue. When covetousness has once entrenched itself in the heart, it bids defiance to every attack from without, and is equally proof against the solid force of reason, or the lighter weapons of ridicule. It is in vain that a covetous man is made the jest of the liberal, or branded with folly by the wise; it is in vain to argue with him; it is in vain to preach to him; and it is only with a view of securing those from avarice who are yet untainted with it, that I mention the miseries of it in this discourse.

The covetous man, I have already observed, is destitute of reason. In his conduct he is evidently so; but as most human beings, and even madmen, think that they act agreeably to reason, let us endeavour to find out upon what principles the man of avarice is reconciled to himself.

Doubtless he imagines, like the man of pleasure, that he is in the only way that leadeth to happiness; for the pursuit of that is the first mover with us all. He imagines so, I say, but upon what grounds? He knows, that wealth will purchase every outward convenience of life; that it will procure us respect, and set us free from labour: this he concludes, and, so far, he judges rightly. "But it is not a little, says he, that will do these things; I must have yet more before I can quietly and comfortably sit down to enjoy it—Well; now I have obtained what I proposed; yet there is one piece
of

of dignity which I should be glad to have, but which my fortune will scarcely bear, therefore I must have yet more, before I can quietly and comfortably sit down to enjoy it." Thus he reasons with himself, till—he dies;—till he is surprized to find that life is at an end, while he is yet only in the way to happiness.

But this mode of reasoning is followed only by one set of the covetous. There are many, who, without any view to future or distant happiness, neither have, nor seek any other pleasure than that of hoarding and accumulating. These are far gone in the money-loving madness, and have not even a pretence to justify their conduct by reason. Gold is their idol, and their covetousness is, as the Apostle terms it, idolatry. These are equally guilty; but they are not more happy than the wretch I have been just describing; for, like those poor Indians, who give up half their food to their idols, they go without common necessities to increase their treasure, and starve themselves to lay up the provisions of life.

It was not so much my design, upon this occasion, to expose the criminal nature of covetousness, as to prove the misery that attends it; but as virtue is certainly a means of happiness, I may observe, that it must be unknown to the man of avarice; for it is scarce possible that he should have any virtue. The social virtues are those which, in their practice, are most peculiarly delightful; but what social virtue can a covetous man be capable of? To relieve the wants of his fellow-creatures, would be inconsistent with his principles of saving—To compassionate their miseries, to yield them the consolations of a feeling heart; of that he is equally incapable: for the heart of avarice never feels. The tender sensations of pity, the warmth of social love, the glow of friendship, and the liberal joy that is inspired by the general happiness, he never felt, or desired to feel. His heart, absorbed in the lowest of vulgar passions, the love of glittering earth, knows no other affection, no superior sentiment. To the happiness that is derived from the intercourse of society, he is an utter stranger; for he looks for nothing more from his connections with his fellow-creatures than the advancement of his favourite views, the increase of his wealth.

II. Yet, thus miserable as he is, he may

possibly think himself happier than the poor who is despised of his neighbour. If he does, let him go with us a moment into the cottage of humble labour and contented poverty.

What do I hear in this place? the voice of joy! the simple song of cheerful innocence! How still, how peaceful is this rustic habitation! Sure this is the dwelling of quietness! She has taken up her abode beneath this humble roof, and health, and content, and cheerfulness, are her inmates. Behold! here is a matron following her daily employment, and two smiling children playing by her! See, how her eye is filled with maternal affection! and how she rejoices, while she earns their provision of bread! Behold, now, the good man is returned from the field, and the humble board is spread for his repast! How plain and simple is his food! a mere sufficiency for the support of nature! It is indeed but a handful—But it is eaten in quietness. Here is nothing of that superfluity which solicits the palled appetite of luxury: but here is enough for nature: here is a handful, and she asks no more.

III. From this scene of humble happiness, let us go to the dwelling of the rich. Is this a social dwelling, or is it a prison? Behold! we cannot gain admission—the gates are made fast with bolts of iron. This is a sure sign that security is not here; and yet security is the friend of happiness. But who is yonder that walks so pensively, with looks of suspicion? It is the master of the house; he seems disturbed; he saw us approach, and concluded that we were coming to make him poor.

Miserable wretch! what profit hast thou in the abundance that thou possessest? Both thy hands, indeed, are full, but so likewise is thy heart; full of trouble and endless vexation. Or hast thou a moment's peace? How soon is it liable to be destroyed? The moth and the rust shall corrupt thine unsunned garments; the thief shall break through and steal thy treasure. A misfortune that which thou wilt never be able to survive; for where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also.

Miserable wretch! Cast away that wealth which is the bane of thy happiness; go to that poverty which thou darest; and to be happy, first be poor. Strange doctrine this to thee! But know, for

for all this, that it is just. The poor, whom thou despisest, are happier than thou art. Didst thou not hear the song of cheerfulness; didst thou not see the smile of contented industry, where there was but a handful?

Miserable wretch! What a painful, what a troublesome life dost thou lead! Thy servants curse thee—Thy friends forsake thee—Friends did I say? Thou never hadst a friend; but those that might naturally have been thy friends desert thee, and scarce forbear to wish so useless a being dead.

Miserable wretch! In what fordid meanness dost thou pass thy days! With what jealousy dost thou look upon the very cringing dependents that pick up a wretched pittance at thy board! And are thy nights less painful, or less vexatious than thy days? Does sleep, undisturbed sleep, await thee? Art thou acquainted with quietness and repose? No—these are strangers, to whom thy gates are not opened. These have no society with cares, and fears, and perplexities, such as thou art exposed to both by day and by night. Better, surely, is a handful with quietness, than thy hoarded wealth, with thy vexation of spirit.

Thus far of avarice, the peculiar wretchedness of which the preacher, no doubt, had in view: but wealth has miseries arising from other causes than covetousness, which render a handful with quietness still preferable.

IV. Riches are not necessarily productive of evil. They may be made the means of happiness when properly managed. They may contribute to the gratification of benevolence, and to the exercise of almost every social virtue. They may be employed in the diffusion of knowledge, or in the relief of indigence; and when converted to these purposes, they are a real blessing: they increase the happiness of a benevolent temper, and give pleasure to their possessors, while they are useful to society.

But it is seldom that they are employed to these happy and beneficent ends. The right use of them is most commonly perverted; and what might have been a blessing, is rendered a curse, by the abuse of it.

When riches are made subservient only to pride; when they are employed in foolish vanity, and empty ostentation, what

do they produce but travail and vexation of spirit? Those who place their happiness in being admired for splendour, will be frequently mortified by negligence, or traduced by envy. We are very unwilling to pay that deference which is expected from us only on the account of magnificence, and, whatever may be the cause of that unwillingness, it is certainly very reasonable; for he who hopes to be admired for that which gives him no merit, offers an insult to the understanding of him from whom he looks for admiration: but when that admiration is withheld, vanity is mortified; and wealth, by being subservient to her desires, brings her only travail and anguish of spirit.

As much perverted is the use of riches, when they are employed in the gratification of luxury, and, of consequence, when thus used, they bring nothing but vexation.

Those, who, like the prodigal in the gospel, spend their substance in riotous living, lay up for themselves almost all the miseries that are incident to human nature: for what can be more wretched than the condition of him who is equally destitute both of health and peace? Whose body is tormented with pain and disease, while his mind is racked with the reflection of guilt and folly? Yet such, generally, are the fruits of intemperance.

In these, and in many other respects, may the goods of fortune be abused; and hence that sore evil under the sun, viz. riches, given to the hurt of the owners!

Let us then conclude, with the wise preacher, that a little, with content and quietness, is preferable to much treasure, and trouble therewith. Let us be assured that peace of mind, as there can be no happiness without it, is the first thing worth our seeking. If this quietness is to be met with more frequently in an humble than in a high station, let us not be dazzled with false appearances, but conclude that the humble station is the better.

We have seen that riches are frequently a misfortune to those that possess them; we have seen the miseries of avarice, the discontent of vanity, and the pains of intemperance: should we not, then, rather avoid than sigh for a condition that might expose us to misery, to discontent and pain?

Let us not flatter ourselves that we should

should act more wisely than others in situations which we have contemplated, but never tried; for no man knows what influence a change of circumstances will have upon him, before that change comes to pass. New accessions of fortune bring with them new wants, new sentiments, and new desires; and that man acts with a laudable firmness, who, when he becomes wealthier, does not become worse.

In one word; let us remember that it is both our duty and our happiness to be contented with the station which Providence has assigned us; and, though we have but a handful, if we possess it in quietness, it is better than both the hands full, with travail and vexation of spirit.

S E R M O N V.

The Folly and Misery of Wickedness.

ISA. lvii. 21.

There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.

REASON is not the only guide that, exclusive of revelation, is appointed us for our conduct. The feelings of the heart are so many powerful monitors that continually suggest to us what we ought to do. The disquiet that attends the pursuit of wickedness plainly points out the necessity of a different conduct, and the heart is, in this case, appealed to by the most significant of all arguments, the attainment of its own happiness.

But how weak are all the motives, and how inactive the principles of natural religion! The sense of right and wrong places, indeed, our duty before us, but by no means affords us the power of pursuing it; and even the miseries of a mind that is enslaved by vice are generally insufficient to reclaim it.

It may not, however, be inexpedient to expatiate on that wretchedness which is the portion of guilt; since, though the guilty may be but little affected by a representation of their own unhappy state, the innocent may, at least, be encouraged to hold fast their integrity, when they behold the distresses that are inseparable from wickedness.

That consciousness of its own immortality, which is implanted in every hu-

man mind, unavoidably leads it forward to the contemplation of futurity. On the reflections, which this contemplation produces, depends much of our pleasure or pain. The good man, from a sense of the divine favour, cannot consider it without satisfaction and hope; the wicked, from a contrary conviction, cannot think of it without misery.

He whose hopes are not in God, who has lived in idle negligence, or in open violation of his laws, must, for the same reason that makes the good man rejoice, dread the events of life and death. When he calmly reflects, (and reflection will sometimes interfere) he can find nothing in his past life that can recommend him to the favour of that power, who delights in goodness, and is a rewarder of the just. Deprived then of that favour, what shall he do? or how shall he look forward to the dismal prospect that lies before him? How shall he support the thought of being excluded for ever from the presence of that being, who has promised eternal happiness to his servants? Shall he be capable of entertaining such a thought without terror and anguish?

Miserable is the condition of wickedness even in this life. Gaiety and dissipation may occasionally banish thought, and produce some intervals of ease or mirth, but the flighty scene will quickly disappear, and remorse and distraction renew their assaults. The voice of flattery may for a while soothe the breast with false hope, and paint delightful scenes and agreeable prospects; but the amusive dream will vanish in a moment, and reason and reflection condemn the folly of attention.

Happy, indeed, would it be, could the repeated attacks of these friendly monitors at length disengage us from our miserable attachments—at length persuade us to seek our happiness in the paths of religious peace: but such is the obstinacy of depraved inclinations, that the vicious man, though he may feel the inquietudes of conscience, seldom listens to its dictates, or takes the proper means to reconcile it to his conduct.

To divert it, indeed, means are generally consulted, and expedients are sought to soothe it into rest; but the slumbers of an unapproving conscience never last long. A thousand accidents concur to bring back reflection, and it is only suspended

pended to acquire the greater force. To what miserable arts is the wicked man reduced in order to be reconciled to himself, and to stifle the efforts of that conviction, from which it is not in the power of the heart to set itself free! What a wretched expedient to return to the same practices his mind is now condemning, from whose tribunal he is labouring to escape!

Strange, indeed, is it, that he who pretends merely to act from the suggestions of nature, and makes those a plea for the indulgence of every inclination, should not here listen to the natural friend of his bosom, whose kind endeavours are exerted to rescue him from ruin! Strange, that the habit of vice should be so infatuating, as still to keep its votaries attached to it, in spite of reason and of happiness on the one hand, and the diseases and disquietudes it produces on the other!

For though the sense of having forfeited the favour of that all-powerful Being, on whom we depend, might alone be a sufficient cause of wretchedness, yet that is far from being the whole portion of misery that awaits the wicked.

The disorders that the body derives from intemperance, the fear of being detected in vice or villany, and of suffering either in loss of reputation, or of life; the vexations of frequent disappointments, which, to those whose only hopes are centered in this life, and who have no dependance on, or expectations from Providence, must be very many and very great; and numberless causes of dissatisfaction beside contribute to enlarge the woes of wickedness, and to take from the vicious man every prospect of rest.

Is this the portion of the guilty? Is this the life for which they forfeit heaven, and are these the delights and the pleasures of sin? Great God! can there be in creatures thou hast endowed with the power of reflection such folly as this? Doth not even the unreasoning animal consult, in the best manner he can, his own ease and happiness? But man is industrious to destroy both. He refuses the very means of peace and security, and pursues the obvious path to destruction and misery.

What can thus infatuate the mind, and make it regardless of the dictates of conscience and of reason?—of conscience,

that would lead us into the way of salvation, and of reason, that would point out the dangers we should avoid.

Can we be so much wrapt up in present objects, so careless of the future, as to neglect that which the next moment may refuse us the power to perform, and the omission of which, will be attended by the worst of consequences?

Can it be in the power of a world that hath deceived us as often as we have trusted it, to make us withdraw our hearts from, and forfeit our hopes to a better? Can we calmly meditate on the loss of eternal happiness, and pursue the paths of sin with security of heart? No: the prophet observes that the wicked enjoy not even this security, that they never know the happiness of a mind at ease, but are like the troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters cast forth mire and dirt.

Astonishing it is that the tempest should not at last make them weary, and desirous of rest in some quiet harbour! Can the fair scenes of peace have no attraction? can the pleasing prospects of happiness fail to induce? Alas! they fail. The eye refuses to look upon them, or beholds them at best with careless indifference. The wicked, though they have no peace, seldom take the right method to procure it, but continue in those very practices which already have destroyed their satisfaction. Is it that they are afraid of applying to an offended God for pardon? or is it that they have yet some favourite sin which, in spite of all their misery, they cannot part with, and which that they may preserve they are content to risk every hope of futurity?

Should we reason thus in the affairs of this life, we should be deservedly marked for the most pitiable folly. Who would not forego a little present advantage for a large reversion? Who would not suffer a little inconvenience to avoid distress or ruin? Is it not better that one member, nay that two, or three, should perish, than that the whole body should be destroyed?

What, then, remains but that the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his path, and that he turn unto the Lord, who will have mercy upon him, and to God that will abundantly pardon?

If yet he hope to taste of life without anguish,

anguish, or to enjoy the light without bitterness of soul; if he would seek any serenity of mind, any peace of heart, while in this state of being; let him not delay to apply to him, who alone can give rest to the weary and the heavy-laden.

If he have any regard for the welfare of a future existence, if any hope of passing an immortal life in happiness, let him make use of the day, while it is called to-day, and, before the grave shall close its everlasting doors upon him, let him seek by repentance what he has forfeited by vice.

Upon the whole, if we wish for peace or satisfaction in this life, let it be remembered that it is only to be found in the duties of religion. Every other scheme will prove ineffectual—He who can have nothing to entitle him to the favour of God, must be uneasy with respect to his future situation; if, indeed, he believes in a future state. Should he affect to disbelieve it, yet he cannot be happy, because no man can, at all times, be an infidel. The voice of reason and of conscience will occasionally interfere, and will stagger the resolution of the most determined obstinacy.

A man may, perhaps, live an atheist, but no man ever died one. We give credit to the interests of this world no longer than it flatters us with pleasure, or furnishes us with amusement; and when the prospect of these shall vanish, reason will assert her slighted authority, and will suggest it to us to seek a refuge where, hitherto, we had been unaccustomed to place it.

In these circumstances, of what shall the wicked avail himself? What agonies must he feel, when the soul labours under fear and apprehension, while the body languishes in pain and sickness? How will he blame his folly and presumption, his obstinacy and ingratitude, that have robbed him of the only hope that could support him through the vale of death, or open any pleasing prospect to the allotments of eternity! How will he mourn over the ruins of his folly, when every sense is lost in terror and confusion, and every reflection terminates in despair!

Such is the melancholy fate of the wicked, whose life is misery, and whose death is distraction!

Let us, my friends, as we know these things, avail ourselves of the knowledge. Let us secure the favour of God, and life or death shall alike bring us happiness.

Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace.

SERMON VI.

The religious and moral Necessity of charitable Contributions.

MATT. XXV. 45.

Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

IF the last charge of Heaven can affect us; if the final sentence of the Judge of the world deserve our care; if it may concern us to know why God accepts, why he rejects his creatures, the import of these words should be well weighed.

Our Saviour, describing the last judgment, has given us this account of the proceedings of that great day.

When the Son of man, says he, shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory;

And before him shall be gathered all nations;

And he shall separate them one from another, the good on his right hand, and the wicked on his left.

Then shall he say to those on his right hand; Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world.

And this is the cause why he pronounces them worthy of his acceptance.

I was an hungered, says he, and ye gave me meat, thirsty and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger and ye took me in; naked and ye clothed me; I was sick and ye visited me; in prison and ye came unto me.

When the righteous shall disown the remembrance of these kind offices, and modestly refuse the acknowledgment to which they think themselves not entitled—then shall he reply.

Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

When the wicked stand arraigned for the neglect of those duties which the
righte-

righteous had discharged, the sense of guilt leads them to seek an evasion in the same answer which the candour of the just made use of to disclaim a merit they could not apply.

For, *When, say they, saw we thee an hungered and fed thee not, or thirstily and gave thee no drink? When saw we thee a stranger and took thee not in, or naked and clothed thee not? Sick, or in prison, and visited thee not?*

Then shall he answer,——

Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

In the progress of this discourse, I shall consider,

I. The nature and objects of charity, as described by our Saviour.

II. The moral reasonableness of that duty.

III. The absolute necessity of it; in compliance with the divine commands; and,

IV. Draw such reflections from the whole as may best excite us to the due discharge of it.

First, I am to consider the nature and objects of charity, as described by our Saviour. Charity is not, nor ought to be, confined to any sect or party of men.

When the Judge of the world, addressing himself to the righteous, says, *Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren*, all nations are before him, and are universally included in that title.

The particular objects, mentioned in the context, are the hungry and thirsty, the stranger and the naked, the sick and the prisoner.

Though all the circumstances of human misery and misfortune are not here enumerated, they are, most of them, implied.

Those conveniences which fortune can supply will find their proper objects in the hungry and the naked; and none are more entitled to the kind offices of humanity than the sick and the prisoner.

They who through misfortunes, or the various disadvantages of life, are become destitute of the common necessities of nature, are certainly entitled to the assistance of those, who, perhaps, have been enriched by the same inconstant hand of chance that has reduced these to depend on their relief; if it be proper to call that the hand of chance, which

may, possibly, in some cases, be nothing else but the wise dispensation of Providence, that places these objects before us for the exercise of virtue.

Shall I then see my brother in distress without giving him that assistance which Heaven has placed in my power? How shall I hope for the continued bounty and blessing of God, if I deal not my bread to the hungry? How shall I claim the merits of my Redeemer's mediation, a charity which must be extended to me, if I neglect his most material precepts, and refuse my raiment to defend the naked? The hungry and the naked are the work of his hands, and have an equal right to human conveniences with myself.

Those who are in sickness and pain, who cannot taste the pleasures of life for anguish, who have their bed in darkness, and their pillow on the thorn, are real objects of pity and consolation.

To visit the sick, and to give them the little comfort we can administer, is an indispensable duty; and though the kind offers of condoling pity be unable to stay the feeble knees, or support the drooping head—yet is it not entirely useless; for, besides that in offering our compassion, we discharge a duty incumbent on humanity, it is not altogether vain with respect to the object. The wretched, though incapable of the pleasures of society, are pleased to find themselves not neglected in their misery; and it is some alleviation to pain, to find an ear that will attend to, and a heart that will pity its complaints.

The unhappy objects who have lost both their liberty and their fortunes, who, after encountering the accidents of business, and the difficulties of poverty, at last find a retreat in the solitary horrors of a prison, and are fast bound in misery and iron, are indeed pitiable, for their condition is wretched. To visit and relieve these unhappy creatures is a charity truly meritorious.

To be excluded the society of mankind, not to mention the want of comfortable conveniences, is a sad condition of being, and in itself sufficiently miserable.

Contrary to the condition of the prisoner, but not much inferior in distress, is that of him to whom our Judge gives the name of a stranger.

I was a stranger, and ye took me not in.
Under

Under this denomination are included all who have no immediate residence in life; who wander up and down in solitary places, and have found no city to dwell in. To lend these an occasional defence from the inclemency of cold, and the pain of hunger; to help the weary on their way; to be given to hospitality, and to entertain strangers, is not surely too great a task for Christian humanity.

Such is the nature, and such are the objects of charity mentioned by our Saviour.

Give me leave, in the next place, to consider the moral reasonableness of that duty.

Secondly, No man is made for himself, but for the whole. Every individual is as a link in the great chain of society, where all are knit together, and mutually dependent. The animating and connecting principle is self-love, which seeks its own good in that of its fellow-creatures. If this principle be wrong directed; if we, through a false conclusion, refuse to assist any member of our species whose necessities demand relief, we neglect the import of moral rectitude and the fitness of things, as well as break through the strongest bond of community, which is mutual support. But the reasonableness of charity needs not to be proved by abstracted speculations, its intrinsic excellence sufficiently recommends it.

To contribute freely to worthy and charitable designs is a great and infallible argument of a benevolent mind: a mind that has honourable thoughts of Providence; that relies upon it; and is secure and unconcerned about the events of this life.

Such a person seems to understand the true use of this world, and to have no more than a just value for it. He will not be governed and made a slave by his fortune, but is resolved to make use of it for the purposes to which it was given, and chuses rather to live charitably than to die rich.

“He that forgets not to do good, and communicate, gives us a fair assurance that his conversation is in heaven; that he has made a higher choice, and is in pursuit of nobler objects than are to be met with here; for, if he had no further aim than the views of temporal happiness, if his thoughts were only confined to this world, we should have reason to

believe, that he would not part so freely with it.”

There is no stronger proof of the internal excellence of charity, than that admiration it infallibly draws after it, when it appears in low and unwealthy characters. When the abilities of the giver are small! when he has nothing to depend on but what the hand of labour has procured him, and lives successively by the industry of the day!

When, as St. Paul testifies of the Macedonians, men are willing not only to their power, but beyond it, and, like the widow in the gospel, cast, as it were, their whole living into the treasury of the poor, this is an undeniable, and a glorious evidence of the benevolence and devotion of their temper, that they have a worthy apprehension of God, and are generously inclined towards their fellow-creatures.

Besides the moral necessity and excellence of charity, the reasonableness of it is probable in that it is consistent with the dignity of human nature.

It is a god-like thing to relieve the necessities of the wretched, and to imitate the noblest attribute of Heaven in supporting the poor and defenceless.

“The charitable person, when his fortune bears any proportion to the largeness of his mind, is the great and universal remedy against the calamities of life: he is a father to the fatherless, eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame; he is liberty to the captive; and, if not health, yet ease and refreshment to the sick.”

To dry the tears of want, and to soothe the anguish of pain; to cheer desponding grief, and to make the mind of necessity easy, and resigned, must be the highest rational satisfaction that the mind of man can be capable of.

“What a heavenly pleasure is conceived in beholding a poor object transported with joy on receiving a liberal alms from the hand, or refreshment from the table of another! How delightful is it to abate, if not extinguish, the misery of one of our own species, and to communicate pleasure at so cheap a rate! To have the conscious satisfaction, and assurance, that our minds are generous and humane, that the soul is untainted by covetousness, and envy, and consequently free from the disturbance of those detestable

testable passions, gives both dignity and happiness to human nature."

By this we have the sublime liberty to conclude that we are, in some measure, of a temper resembling that of the Author of our being, and that we shall meet his approbation in the rewards of immortality.

S E R M O N VII.

The religious and moral Necessity of charitable Contributions.

MATT. XXV. 45.

Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

THE nature and objects of charity, as described by our Saviour, and the reasonableness of that duty, upon moral principles, having been already considered, I shall now proceed to shew,

III. The absolute necessity of it, in compliance with the divine commands.

The eternal Providence, wise in all his dispensations, and leaving over all his works a wide field for the practice of moral virtue, has permitted a variety of circumstances and conditions in human life, as well for that necessary subordination in the government of society, as to lay open the virtue of resignation to the poor, and that of beneficence to the wealthy.

As a great part of moral virtue consists in this beneficence, man would have had little to do as a social creature, had an equality of conditions rendered charity unnecessary.

But then it must be remembered, that as Providence has rendered this virtue universally practicable, he has likewise made the practice of it an indispensable duty. Consistently with his unerring wisdom and benevolence, he has not left the support of the poor to the voluntary exertion of a virtue, founded only on choice, or on natural principles; but has expressly charged the rich in this world that they should be ready to distribute, and willing to communicate.

It is, indeed, an honourable commission that they have from the Almighty, to give his household their portion of meat; but they should reflect, that as the trust is honourable and weighty, they ought to perform it with a proportionable fidelity,

and that it is required in a steward that he be found faithful.

Few, perhaps, of those who enjoy the luxury of affluence can boast superior merit; they ought not, therefore, to look upon themselves as entitled to the comforts of plenty exclusive of their fellow-creatures, but to consider that *the poor are the Lord's, and so is the earth, and the fulness thereof.*

This consideration ought to have its due effect, with regard to the duty of charity, were it enjoined by no particular commands in the sacred writings. But scarce any author there, from the founder of Christianity, to the lowest prophet or apostle, has left this duty unconsidered; scarce any but has given us some directions about the discharge of it, proved its necessity, or displayed its excellence.

Though the Christian doctrine explains it better, and enjoins it more strongly, yet was it not unknown in the Mosaic dispensation. So great was, even then, the reputation of charity, that the Jews made a parade of performing it, and sounded a trumpet to summon the poor to their alms.

This method, indeed, of relieving the necessitous, was not so much the consequence of a charitable disposition as of despicable vanity, and deserved no other name; but it is, nevertheless, a sufficient evidence how reputable and how honourable this virtue was accounted.

Nor does this only prove to us the credit of charity with respect to human opinion, as a virtue only morally good, exclusive of any religious injunction: They knew it to be a duty enjoined by, and the discharge of it acceptable to God. Thus we hear the Pharisee, when enumerating his virtues, and making a merit of his piety, declaring that he gave alms twice a week.

That his prayer was rejected, and the wretched publican preferred before him, is no argument that the virtue of charity was not acceptable. His was not charity but insolence, not humanity but pride. Nor is it a wonder that his address was not received by that Being who is the searcher of hearts, and who judges not from the action but from the principle.

If we consult the history of our blessed Redeemer, we shall find him, on many occasions, besides this mentioned, describing

scribing and enjoining the duty of charity; so frequently and so strongly does he inculcate it, that it may be called the very essence of Christianity, and its cardinal virtue: nor can there be any impropriety in that assertion; for it is the sum of religion, and may be rightly defined the love of God and of our neighbour.

He who is destitute of this love, who acts not from this principle, whatever may be his pretensions to religion, or virtue, wants the essence of both.

We have many descriptions of this duty both by the prophet and apostles, as well as by our Saviour, but the best description is his life.

If we pursue him through the whole scene of his terrestrial existence, we shall find that to go about doing good was his invariable business. To comfort the afflicted, and to feed the hungry; to restore the sick to health, and the blind to sight; to make the deaf hear, the lame walk, and the dumb speak, were the exercises he delighted in, and the continued actions of the day.

This was the life whose merits entitle us to heaven, and which is proposed the pattern of our imitation.

Hence appears the absolute necessity of Christian charity; for should we neglect those precepts which the captain of our salvation has so strongly enjoined, how shall we hope for his favour! how shall we plead for acceptance by the merits of that life, whose example we have not profited by—which we thought not worth our imitation?

To add to the force of this argument, I might here quote the several texts of Scripture wherein God has expressly commanded the duty of charity. But what has already been said will, I hope, be sufficient to convince you as well of the nature and reasonableness, as the absolute necessity of it.

IV. I shall only now, therefore, draw such reflections from the whole, as may best excite us to the due discharge of it.

As the great end of society is mutual assistance and support, if through iniquitous selfishness, we refuse that assistance to others, which, in the possible chance of things, we ourselves might have stood in need of, we transgress the laws of nature, and the dictates of reason.

The great maxim of moral life is, “to

do to others as we would have others do to us.” But if we neglect the complaints of misery which we could comfort, or the cries of distress we can possibly relieve; do we not resist the voice of nature and of reason, supposing the injunctions of religion entirely out of the question?

As man is formed for society, he is naturally a benevolent being, ready to rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep, kindly interests himself in the welfare, and wishes the prosperity of his fellow-creatures.—That this is more particularly the genius of this nation, the many public charities established within these few years sufficiently testify. These, let us hope, may cover a multitude of our national crimes. Would to heaven there were not such a multitude to cover!—These are noble instances of that charming spirit of benevolence which is inspired by virtue, by piety, and wisdom!

Indeed, he who, in the midst of luxury and affluence, can behold his fellow-creatures ready to perish with want, deserves not the name of a human being. What can justify the man who gives to a tribe of useless domestics, or creatures that have no further end than to contribute to his amusements, that bread which the laborious hind has procured him, while he, perhaps, through want of a sufficiency of it, pines in weakness, or languishes to death?

What numbers of poor, whose industry is ineffectual, would the superfluity of affluence support!

How many are rendered incapable of labour by sickness, or accidents, or the infirmity of age, who cannot be received into public hospitals, and who get, it is to be feared, little relief from public contributions!

How many starve in unseen solitudes, scattered up and down over wilds and deserts, where the hand of kindness was never extended, which the eye of benevolence never saw!

Though we are not obliged to imbitter life by constantly partaking of, or contemplating the miseries of our species, yet it is our duty to hear the complaints of distress, and to relieve necessity on all possible occasions.

We are assured that we are by such means laying up for ourselves infinite

happiness in a future existence: for we are told, that *he who giveth to the poor, lendeth to the Lord.*

How ought the rich in this world to rejoice that they have it in their power to invest their possessions in the security of heaven! Can there be any greater joy to a rational creature than this, that he can make the frail fortunes of this life last beyond the grave?

This is effectually to lay up treasure in a repository free from the inroads of the robber, and the rust of time.

Riches thus applied, are, indeed, a blessing; nor shall their possessors find, if thus they dispose of them, any unhappy consequences from that declaration, that it is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The divine pleasure which a benevolent mind enjoys in relieving the necessities of the wretched, is, all other considerations apart, well worth the purchase. It is, as it were, a foretaste of that eternal joy which shall be the sure reward of those who have pity on the poor.

Since, then, nature and reason call upon us; since heaven and happiness invite us; since all laws, moral and divine, oblige us, let us perform this duty with cheerfulness and alacrity; for *God loveth a cheerful giver.*

Let us willingly impart of the good things of this life to the poor and needy. *The Lord careth for them. Freely we have received, let us freely give.*

Let us lay out the wealth we have in those uses, for which only it is serviceable, in clothing the naked, and feeding the hungry.

Let us not suppose that to be lost which is given to the poor; it is lent unto the Lord, and he will repay it.

That we may never be inattentive to the complaints of the necessitous, and never unheard, when we implore the mercies of Heaven, may the God of all truth and kindness grant.

S E R M O N VIII.

The Happiness of determined and conscious Integrity.

JOB, xxvii. 6.

My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.

UNSTABLE as water, thou shalt not excel, said the dying patriarch to one

of his sons; and the sentiment was indeed worthy of that wisdom and prophetic knowledge which the eastern sages were supposed to have been, in a particular manner, favoured with, upon the approach of death.

In matters that relate to the common conduct of life, to the progress of art, and the acquisition of knowledge, it is obvious, both from reason and experience, that a wavering disposition can never attain either to excellence or to happiness. With regard to religion, the conclusion is equally true. It is in vain for him who putteth his hand to the plough, and looketh back, to hope for the rewards of that industrious perseverance, which, though it may, for a while, go on its way sorrowing, shall, at the last, return with joy, and bring its sheaves with it. He only it is who endureth to the end, that shall be saved; he who, through all the trying changes of this life, like the patriarch, will not remove his integrity from him, who holdeth fast his righteousness, and will not let it go; he only it is who may hope for the sublime and distinguished rewards of immortality.

Agreeably to the doctrine of the prophet, if the righteous man forsaketh his righteousness, and falleth into iniquity, *in his iniquity that he hath committed shall he die. In due time we shall reap, if we faint not*; but if we grow weary in well-doing; if we run not with patience and perseverance the race which is set before us; if we retire with the slothful, and give up the prospect of the promised land, because the sons of Anak are to be grappled with, we may expect that our portion will be appointed with those who are finally accounted unprofitable servants.

The Christian warfare is, indeed, by no means to be considered as a trivial avocation. The sword and the shield must be grasped with unremitting vigilance; for many are the trials we must expect of our faith and patience, of our firmness and integrity.

The author of the text experienced these trials in a severe degree. His circumstances were such as make affliction always the most unwelcome: he had lived in dignity, which no impertinence could disturb, in affluence above the apprehension of want, and in health and felicity uninterrupted by pain. His house was the resort of peace and friendship; the

voice

voice of the tabret was heard in his dwellings; his flocks filled the mountains, and brought forth thousands, and ten thousands in his streets; his table was clad with the riches of Arabia; and the incense of Sabea breathed on his altars.

Yet thus magnificently distinguished, thus surrounded with luxurious abundance, he was never betrayed into licentious folly, or inflexible arrogance. He did not look upon riches as the evidence of superior merit. He considered them as the gift of God, and forgot not to bless the hand of the giver. His charity and beneficence were large and diffusive, in proportion to his circumstances. He was *eyes to the blind, and feet was he to the lame. His words upheld those that were falling, and he strengthened the feeble knees.*

Such was the conduct of this happy and distinguished eastern prince, when it drew upon him the envy of our common enemy, who, represented as conversing with God, would depreciate that integrity he could not corrupt. *For doth Job, says he, fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.*

In this the deceiver was deceived: when the patriarch was told successively that he was deprived of his sons, his servants, and even all his possessions, he betrayed not one sign of impious resentment, or censorious discontent. *The Lord gave, says he, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.* When, to add to the distress of poverty and loss of children, he was deprived of health too, and doomed, in all appearance, to languish out the miserable remains of life in sickness and in sorrow, he makes the same pious conclusion—*Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?* When made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights were appointed to him, still he possessed his soul in patience, and declares, in the consciousness of determined integrity, *My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.*

Such is the resolution, which, considered in the most comprehensive sense of the

words, should be formed by every Christian, and attended to through the different circumstances of prosperity and adversity. For to hold fast our righteousness under the distresses of misfortune, or afflictions of whatever kind, does not perhaps require greater fortitude or attention, than are necessary in the luxury of affluence, or the carelessness of ease.

When life looks gay around us, when every appetite is summoned to enjoyment, and every sense invited by its object of gratification, we rarely give admittance to serious considerations. Every thought that might interrupt us in the pursuit of pleasure is industriously avoided, and the delightful present robs the future of our care.

Like the traveller, who, charmed with the flowery prospects that surround him, sits down forgetful of his destination, we are apt to lose ourselves in the pleasing scenes of this life, and, while we enjoy the manna, we neglect the promised land.

To continue inflexible to the importunity of the passions, and to resist the solicitations of vice, when she bears before her the bewitching mask of pleasure, is a task to which we should summon all our fortitude. If every avenue is not watched with the utmost attention, and defended with the strongest guard, the vigilant enemy will have the advantage.

It would be superfluous to urge the necessity of this care. If we look around us, what numbers shall we see, who, overcome by the intoxication of sensual enjoyments, have fallen from their integrity, irresistibly borne away on the licentious tide of pleasure, or amused with the dreams of delusive vanity.

To retain our innocence in such a general corruption, when the influence of example, and the tyranny of fashion, reconcile us to the deformity of vice, and almost inforce compliance, requires no inferior degree of resolution.

The world is still so imperceptibly insinuating itself into our esteem, by a thousand stratagems which we cannot be aware of, that no circumspection can be too minute, if we would still hold fast our righteousness, and keep our virtue untainted.

However, to take an impartial estimate of the most flattering pleasures that this life can afford—to divest the gay phantom of temporal happiness, of that false

lustre and ornament in which the pride, the passions, and the follies of men have dressed her up, would, perhaps, be the most effectual method to secure ourselves against her charms. Compared with the purity of virtue, and the valuable consideration of future happiness, all secular delights will appear but as the dust of the balance.

Thus necessary is the care of our righteousness, so far as it includes the virtues of temperance and sobriety, nor ought we to be less diligent in preserving it untainted in its other significations, particularly as it implies moral justice.

To observe strict equity in all our connections, sincerity in our professions, and humanity and moderation in every circumstance of life, requires a constant guard over our passions, and an unremitting attention to the laws of rectitude.

Self-love is so very active and industrious in our service, that unless we keep a constant eye upon her, and direct all her motions, she will be imperceptibly encroaching on the properties of others.

Pride, which is likewise the gift of nature, and necessary as self-love, of which every man is possessed in a greater or a less degree, if not diligently attended to, and kept within its proper sphere, will betray us into censoriousness, insolence, or cruelty.

Emulation, if not duly restrained, will in the consequence, be envy; and even humanity itself insult with the kindness it confers.

Nothing is more true than that the heart may be deceived into vice by the appearance of virtue. Short-sighted creatures as we are, we can seldom foresee to what bounds the most innocent pursuits, when indulged, may lead us; nor are we apprehensive through what different directions a quality apparently good may tend to wickedness. It is necessary, therefore, that we should keep a strict guard over our conduct, and over the habit of our minds; that we should examine impartially the principles from which we act, and the tendency of the action; and that, under every circumstance, we should be cautious, lest the prevalence of private passions should interfere with the practice of the social duties.

The necessity of this minute attention must be obvious to every man who has made the least acquaintance with his own heart, and who wishes that it may not reproach him so long as he shall live.

The last mentioned circumstance is, indeed, of all others the most desirable; for on the approbation of our own hearts depends all our quiet, all our happiness in this world.

He whose heart will not bear witness to the integrity of his conduct, must never know what it is to be truly at ease. Should the endeavours he uses to sooth and silence the remonstrances of his conscience, unfortunately for him, prove successful in that respect, yet he can never know that sensible, that home-felt pleasure which is the inseparable attendant of a heart that is pure.

Behold here the happiness of virtue in the most essential respect! When the glories of that felicity, of which this world gave a promise, vanish away; when temporal hopes are gone, and distress and misfortune make their irresistible inroads, then it is that the conscious mind, secure in itself, and perfectly reconciled to its own reflections, affords a support that is adequate to every transient evil.

This it was which sustained the afflicted patriarch under the greatest distresses that human nature could suffer. On this he always builds his repose, and refers for consolation to the integrity of his heart. His cruel and ill-judging friends would have advised him to forego every sentiment of that kind, and, in consideration of his afflictions, to have looked upon himself as the most abject of offenders. This advice might proceed from excess of piety, but it was certainly wrong; for conscience is an unerring guide, and the heart has always a right to that satisfaction, which its own approbation can give.

I cannot here forbear to observe, that there is, even now, a sect of men who, in this respect, are not unlike to Job's friends. I mean those unhappy and deluded people called Methodists.

These poor fanatics, who are, in general, profoundly ignorant, and who catch at some branch or part of a scriptural text, without being able to attend to the relation and meaning of the whole, are for ever depreciating human virtue, and the merit of moral goodness: hence they do the utmost prejudice to the cause of religion, which is certainly founded on moral principles, while they deprive the virtuous man of that conscious happiness, which the integrity of his heart might afford

ford him. They intirely destroy one of the motives to a good life, which is the sense of that pleasure it may yield; and for ever inculcating the wretchedness of human nature and human virtue, they enlarge the empire of superstition, by opening all the gloomy avenues of self-abasement and despair.

Thus, I say, these unhappy people resemble the friends of Job, who wanted to deprive him of his only remaining consolation, the consciousness of his integrity; but he wisely answered them, *My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.*

S E R M O N IX.

An Exhortation to Beneficence: occasioned by the Bishop of London's recommending the Subject to his Clergy.

GALAT. VI. 10.

Let us do good unto all men.

THIS is surely a precept of the last importance, since it comes recommended to us by every writer, whose pen was charged with the commandments of his God.

Alas! that the precept itself should ever need to be so repeatedly enforced; that the best and most essential part of human virtue should require to be enjoined by so many sanctions, to be inculcated by so many tongues; while the most iniquitous selfishness lays hold on the heart, and depraves those capacities which are derived from the eternal source of reason and benevolence.

What the Almighty originally intended man to be; the conduct that is suitable to the dignity of his nature, and the happiness of his condition, we may learn from the character of that amiable and exalted person, who took upon him the charge of our salvation.

In him we behold essential goodness, and invariable benevolence; a heart for ever actuated by social love, watching, with unwearied kindness, over the welfare of others, and promoting their happiness, with the tenderest assiduity. *He went about*, says the evangelical writer, *doing good.* This was the continual employ-

ment of his life. With this view, he visited every town in Judea, and, for the space of three successive years, made it his business to relieve the sufferings of mankind. Where he went, pain and sickness, and infirmity, fled before him. He was, literally, that sun of righteousness which arose with healing in his wings, and the effects of natural evil were, for a while, suspended in that happy region which had the glory to give him birth.

The effects of natural evil were suspended; nor was the divine benevolence less concerned to prevent, at the same time, the increase of moral evil. He seldom dismissed the sufferer, whom he had restored to health, without reminding him of his duty; and when he had made him whole, he bade him sin no more. Into whatever village he went, he not only healed their sick, but taught the people; and pitied them, as sheep not having a shepherd.

Without honour himself; without being distinguished as a prophet in his own country, or amongst his friends; his beneficence invidiously misrepresented, and his miracles ascribed to the agency of devils; under these circumstances, so mortifying to human weakness, he invariably persevered in the exercise of kindness, and was not weary in well-doing.

Behold him enter the cottage of humble poverty, to comfort an afflicted family, by restoring to their hopes some dear and valuable member! Behold the parent, in speechless anguish, watching the last feeble looks of her departing child! Where is the man of Nazareth to change this heart-breaking scene? Where is he whose tenderness will comfort the parent; whose power can restore the child? He comes—the man of Nazareth approaches! his kind purpose is written in the benignity of his countenance. *Be comforted*, saith he to the mourner, *thy child liveth.*

See here, O Christians! the author of your religion, the pattern of your conduct! Ye cannot, indeed, imitate him in his miraculous powers; but in the motives of his miracles, it is yours to imitate him; it is yours to adopt and cultivate that benevolence which was eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, and comfort to the mourner.

Like your gracious master, you can

visit the sick, the fatherless, and the widow, in their affliction, and, like him, you can feed the hungry.

Need you, by any external motives, be excited to distribute your bread to the hungry? Then turn your eyes upon your amiable Lord, and behold him industriously doing the same!

Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.

That divine benevolence which brought salvation to the soul, was not regardless of the wants of the body. That compassion which pitied and repaired the ruins of our nature; which brought us out of a state of darkness and servility, into the light and liberty of the children of God; that large compassion extended to the minutest necessities of life—Behold it here exerting itself in the support of a multitude that wanted bread! Here was no unnecessary display of a miracle. This multitude was in a desert place, and many of the people came from far. Probably too many of them were poor, and unable to buy themselves bread in the neighbouring villages; for such, in general, were the followers of Jesus. It was charity, therefore, it was pure compassion that gave occasion to this miracle; and here, too, we ought to cherish the motive, though we cannot imitate the effect.

In one respect, however, we may retain something of the miracle; and (as in the case of the loaves and fishes) in distributing our possessions, we may find them increase. Possibly the increase may not, in this case, more than in the other, be immediately visible; but, upon the dissolution of the last great multitude, we shall perceive, that what would not, originally, have filled one basket, shall scarcely then be contained in seven.

To encourage a disposition that shall produce such an happy effect, let us contemplate our benevolent master during the progress of this charitable miracle.

Possibly some such sentiments as these passed in his gracious mind upon that occasion.

“Behold, in this lonely wilderness, what a multitude of my brethren! with concern and affection do I look upon them; for they are the work of my fa-

ther's hand. He who made of one flesh all nations on the earth, meant them to be the aid and support of each other: to this end he ordained the law of religion to consist in mutual benevolence; but, alas! how neglected that law, which, indeed, it is now time for me to re-establish.

“How like unto sheep, not having a shepherd, is this poor and ignorant multitude; that for a while forsaking a servile and precarious dependance on the wealthy, hath followed me, as poor as the poorest, into this barren and uncomfortable desert.

“From their ignorance, indeed, I have endeavoured to set them free, and have taught them many things; but the bread of life is not, alone, sufficient for them; they have now been with me three days in the wilderness, and have eaten nothing; and I must not send them away hungry, lest they faint by the way: my gracious father will readily grant me a supernatural supply, and I shall have the happiness of dispensing his bounty to his creatures.”

Where is the cold heart that is not warmed to charity by a scene like this? where is the narrow spirit that is not enlarged by meditating on such a subject? Where is the selfish wretch that can behold his Saviour feeding the hungry, and dare to omit so necessary a duty? That Saviour, on whose mediation he depends for everlasting happiness, by whose kind intercession alone he must hope for the favour of God—will he dare to withhold his hand, when he calleth upon him to relieve his brethren?

It is astonishing that those who profess to follow the principles and precepts of the gospel, and call themselves by the name of the Son of God, should need a moment's exhortation to charity. Know they not that this is the most essential precept of the Christian dispensation? Need they be informed that their Saviour, their Redeemer, the Judge of the world, has declared these to be the conditions of his accepting them at the last day, viz. that they shall freely have contributed to the relief of the necessitous? They need not be informed; would to God they needed not to be exhorted! But true it is, that, however reasonable any duty may appear, or how strongly soever it may be enforced by the divine laws, the human mind will frequently be inattentive to it, and leave it among the
objects

objects that are known and disregarded.

Beneficence is in itself so noble a virtue, so distinguished by its peculiar greatness, that one would think it impossible to consider, without embracing it, or to contemplate, without making it our own.

Yet all amiable, all engaging as charity appears, instead of being admired as an angel, she is avoided as a siren. The reverberations she promises are looked upon as flattering delusions, designed only to draw us into a present expence. We are not liberal enough to take her unportioned to our favour, and therefore we determine to depreciate her virtues. Her generosity we call profusion, and her benevolence weakness.

The cause of all this is the prepossession of the heart. Wealth is an object that brings present gratifications along with it; and how low, or how mean soever those gratifications may be, they prevail over the influence of greater, because distant hopes.

To overcome this false attachment, and mistaken choice, there is no better method than to reflect how vain and transitory is every temporal possession! How soon the imagined charms of riches vanish away, and leave the owner convinced that the privilege of food and raiment is all that they can boast! How delusive are those pleasures which fortune promises, and novelty for a while endears: and how certain that disgust and discontent, which attend the decline of a life whose only hopes repose on this world!

If truth could obtain admittance for such reflections as these, and if the mind could be persuaded to consider things in this light, it might not, perhaps, be difficult to recommend to it better hopes, and more perfect enjoyments.

He who should be convinced of the insufficiency of wealth to obtain any lasting happiness in this world, might not be displeased to find that it was possible to invest it in the security of another. He who had vainly wearied himself in the pursuit of fugitive enjoyments, might be gratified by discovering the means of that permanent happiness, which by experience he hath found unattainable on earth.

Such are the prospects which charity brings along with her; and such is the happiness which she has the power to give.

He who hath contributed to feed the hungry, and to clothe the naked; who hath been a friend to the stranger, the sick, and the prisoner, hath a moral right to hope for an interest with that Saviour, who has declared that he would accept these offices as done to himself.

Involved in this interest are the most exalted and magnificent hopes; prospects that bring to sight the regions of eternal felicity; ages that glide away in intellectual joy and love; where the faculties spread and bloom for ever; stretching forward to the excellence of superior natures; unbroken by exercise, and unimpaired by time.

These, these are hopes which it is in the power of Beneficence to give. O exalted virtue! O glorious power! which, if we exercise it in this scene of imperfection, shall lead us hereafter to an innumerable company of saints and angels, where we shall experience a greater and more perfect harmony of affections; where sympathy shall be warm without weakness; and where the interchanges of love shall be more tender and more dear!

Does emulation warm us? Are we affected with a generous desire of excellence? Behold it here! To be charitable is to make approaches towards the nature of God—to do good, is to act like him.

If it be impossible for human beings even to make approaches towards the divine nature; yet it must be their glory and their happiness to resemble, in disposition, the angelic powers; to imitate those exalted spirits, that leave their mansions of felicity to attend inferior creatures, nor deem it unequivalent to the enjoyments of heaven to relieve the conflicts of suffering virtue, and to rescue misery from the horrors of despair.

Those exalted spirits that rejoiced with the father of everlasting mercies, when the foundations of the earth were laid; that sung together for joy, when, in kindness, he called forth this smiling creation, and appointed the sun to run his race; that exulted at the rising of the star in Jacob, and proclaimed benevolence to the inhabitants of the earth! Those distinguished beings, as their gracious master has told us, actuated by the spirit of invariable kindness, rejoice upon the repentance of a sinner; and many have be-

lieved, possibly, upon good foundations, that they frequently interpose their care for the preservation and happiness of the human race.

Led by the example of these glorious spirits, and obedient to the precepts of our God and our Redeemer, let us diligently embrace the Apostle's advice, and, as we have opportunity, do good unto all men.

Upon this occasion, when our Sovereign and our Diocesan have called upon us to exercise our beneficence in the relief of our poor brethren, let us not be inattentive to their benevolent exhortations, but exert those abilities which

God hath given us, in promoting the happiness and comfort of his creatures.

A state of indigence very frequently becomes the lot of man, and, many times, from misfortune more than from misconduct. God only knows whether those, who now enjoy a comfortable subsistence, may not, through some unforeseen accident, become the objects of that charity which is this day solicited from them.

Let it not, then, be in vain that it is solicited; but let them do unto others, even as they would have others do unto them.

S E C T I O N X V .

F R O M T H E

S E R M O N S o f A L E X A N D E R G E R A R D , D . D .

P R O F E S S O R o f D I V I N I T Y , i n K I N G ' s C O L L E G E , A B E R D E E N , a n d O n e o f
H I S M A J E S T Y ' s C H A P L A I N S i n O r d i n a r y i n S C O T L A N D .

S E R M O N I .

Religion intimately connected with
ordinary Life.

P S A L M C X V I . 9 .

I will walk before the Lord in the land of the
living.

MAN is a being of a compound nature; he consists of a soul and a body. By the former he is allied to God and angels; by the latter to earth and earthly things. In consequence of this, he is capable of two different sorts of enjoyments, subjected to two distinct classes of desires, and lives at once in two dissimilar states. From the body arise appetites for worldly things, and pleasure in them; from the soul, desires of things spiritual and eternal, and a relish for them. We live an animal or a natural life, and we live at the same time a rational or spiritual life. Thus by the very constitution of our nature, our attention is drawn different ways, our views are directed to contrary objects, and we are engaged in dissimilar employments. By concern about the one, we may become negligent of the other.

The things of this world are the objects of sense; they are continually soliciting our notice; they force themselves into our view; they affect us strongly. By these means they are very apt to render us regardless of spiritual and eternal things, which can be perceived only by faith, which make but a weak impression on the thoughtless, which cannot influence our conduct, except we set ourselves

voluntarily and designedly to meditate upon them. While we are intent on our occupations for the support of the animal life, we may very readily fall into neglect with respect to that occupation which belongs to us as reasonable and immortal creatures. We should guard against this with a care proportioned to the danger of our becoming guilty of it.

The scripture perpetually inculcates upon us, that the eternal happiness of our souls, and the practice of holiness by which it is secured, ought to be our principal concern, and to engage us more earnestly than any of the possessions and enjoyments which can profit us only in the present life, or any of those worldly employments which are subservient to the attainment of them. The least reflection is sufficient to convince us of the propriety and the importance of this conduct. To those who at all think seriously, the difficulty lies only in preserving a commanding impression of the necessity of this conduct, and putting it in practice, amidst the busy scenes and the dissipations of common life. These frequently obliterate the conviction, and efface the sentiments, which are produced by the most affecting representations of the superior value of spiritual and eternal things, exhibited in an hour of retirement and devotion.

It is of great moment, therefore, to acquire a striking sense of the manner in which a concern for the salvation of our souls, and application to the duties of religion, may be intermingled with our whole worldly employment, and exerted in the various circumstances of ordinary life.

life. For discoursing on this subject, we may naturally take occasion from the words now read; *I will walk*, says David, *before the Lord in the land of the living*. To *walk before the Lord*, (Gen. xvii. 1. xxiv. 40. xlviii. 15. 1 Kings, iii. 6. 2 Kings, xx. 3. Psal. lvi. 13.), and, to *walk with the Lord*, (Gen. v. 22. 24. vi. 9. Mich. vi. 8. Mal. ii. 6.), are beautiful expressions used in scripture, on purpose to convey this very view of religion: and the former of them conveys it the more explicitly in this place, by the psalmist's having added, *in the land of the living*. By these last words he no doubt designed to express the constancy of that obedience to God, which he promised in return for the mercies acknowledged in this psalm; he meant to intimate that he would persist in it to the end of his life: but they likewise naturally imply, that he would incorporate his religion with his whole ordinary life, and make it to run through all the occupations in which he might ever be employed in common with other men, and to blend itself with all the transactions relative to the present world, in which he might be at any time engaged. It is certain that the scriptures always suppose religion to be connected with common life, and designed for influencing us in all the affairs of it: they never represent it as a thing which may be laid aside when we come into the world, or for which we have no occasion while we are busied in the labour of our stations.

To consider religion in this important point of view, as what ought to mix with all our secular employments, and give a tincture and complexion to all those actions which have the most intimate relation to the present animal life, is what I now propose.

By setting religion in this light, I do not mean to affirm, that it contains no duties distinct from the right conduct of our ordinary business, or that there are no exercises belonging to it, which are abstracted from common life. There are times and seasons appropriated to particular religious duties, into which no concern about our ordinary business should be allowed to intrude. There are assemblies called together for partaking in the sacraments, for public worship, and for hearing the word, where we must be in-

tent on these exercises alone, and whence we must exclude all worldly thoughts and cares. There are exercises of devotion which must be performed in the secrecy and stillness of retirement; prayer, the reading of the scriptures, meditation on the principles of religion and the obligations of our several duties, self-examination, confession of our sins, and resolutions of amendment. We are not truly religious, if we allow concern for our temporal interests and diligence in our worldly business to lead us into the neglect of these. They have not an immediate relation to the employments of our stations, but they are consistent with them: they suspend them for a little, but they can be performed without any inconvenient interruption of them. These duties of religion enter not directly into common life, nor are intimately incorporated with its functions; they are rather in appearance abstracted from them: but they are in reality subservient to the right discharge of them. They form impressions which may influence us in life, they revive sentiments which, without them, the hurry of business would dissipate; they invigorate principles of conduct which the avocations of the world would enfeeble, but which the good man must act upon every day. Without attendance on these duties of religion, we could have no good sentiments or principles to carry into the world with us: but we attend upon them to no purpose, if we carry not into the world with us, if we maintain not amidst all the bustle of the world, the good sentiments and principles which they are fitted to infuse. The church and the closet are the places where these duties are performed; but the world is the place where we must display the effects which they produce, and exert the temper of holiness which they cherish. The spiritual life must be recruited by the exercises of retirement and retreat; but when it is recruited by these, as the nourishment adapted to it, it is in the world that it must shew its vigour: its functions must mix themselves with all those of the animal life; our employment for eternity must be interwoven with all our occupations for time.

In the sequel I shall, first, point out the importance of this view of religion; and, secondly, explain it.

First,

First, I shall point out the importance of considering religion as connected with all the parts of our ordinary life.

There is no mistake about the nature of religion more dangerous than an opinion that it is inconsistent, or even unconnected, with the ordinary business of life: this opinion will produce different effects on different persons; but all the effects which it can produce, will be pernicious.

If it be entertained, it will infallibly lead the generality to neglect religion altogether. Present things are so constantly in our view, the wants and the demands of the natural life are felt so strongly, that most men will be ingrossed by them, if they apprehend that, without neglecting them, they cannot secure future and unseen things. Did all men perceive clearly, that they may walk with God while they are mixing in the societies and employments of men, and that they may most effectually promote their eternal happiness while they are occupied in the business of their temporal vocations, many would endeavour to *work out their salvation* (Phil. ii. 12.), who scarcely think of it, because they imagine it unconnected with their ordinary business, or incompatible with their worldly pursuits.

Some however have so deep a sense of the importance of their eternal interests, and so strong a solicitude to secure them, that an opinion of their inconsistency with the business and pursuits of life will drive them into the opposite extreme. Under the influence of this mistake many have secluded themselves from the world, withdrawn from all the occupations of life, and given up themselves to idleness, contemplation, and solitary devotion. The life of such persons may be harmless, but it is useless: it may be freer from vice than the lives of others, but it is less virtuous; they have not been exposed to the same temptations with others; their innocence has in many cases arisen only from their want of opportunity for committing sin, not from strength of mind, or the vigour of virtuous principles. Were a life of monkish indolence necessary or conducive to the improvement and salvation of our souls, God would not have placed us in a world where we have so many wants that cannot be satisfied without diligent application to a variety of occupations. An active and busy life is

perfectly consistent with all that God requires of us, for pleasing him or for obtaining eternal happiness. Holiness preserved uncorrupted, and exercised vigorously, in active life, is much worthier than the inoffensive blamelessness of the mere recluse. You should yield your active service unto God. You cannot please him more effectually, than by following your several vocations, by engaging in the ordinary employments of life, by pursuing them with industry, and being conversant about them in a right manner. You do not serve God, you do not labour for eternity, you do not take care of your souls, only when you are meditating, or reading, or hearing, or praying, or partaking of the Lord's supper; but also as effectually, though these purposes be not perhaps so directly in your thoughts, when you are going about your worldly business in a virtuous manner, when you are honestly and conscientiously doing the work of your stations. You may live to God, and yet live in the world. To renounce the world and fly to solitude, is to renounce the station which God has allotted us, and abandon the opportunities of doing good and becoming good, which he has given us.

Men may entertain the mistake of which we are speaking, without running into either of the extremes now mentioned. They may regard religion as something wholly abstracted from life, and yet may engage in the ordinary business of life, without neglecting religion altogether. In this case they will take up with a false species of religion: they will be concerned, perhaps anxiously concerned, for their salvation, but they will pursue it in an improper manner. They imagine that the state of their souls depends only on some formal transactions with God, on some solitary and secret exertions of the will and the affections in dedicating themselves to him, and accepting of Jesus Christ; and that it is nowise affected by the manner in which they carry on their ordinary business. They think that they may be religious, though they be immoral; that they may provide for eternity, though they neglect the duties of time; that they may be in a state of grace, though they be bad husbands, bad wives, unnatural parents, undutiful children, unfaithful servants, unkind

kind and quarrelsome neighbours, or dishonest dealers. They regard the graces of the spirit as totally distinct from the moral virtues; the conduct which God approves, as perfectly different from that behaviour which is useful to mankind. They make an unnatural divorce between religion and morality. In the place of true holiness they substitute an absurd and unprofitable superstition. Alas, my brethren, they deceive themselves! If they act according to this idea, their religion will have no greater influence upon their conduct, than if they made no pretences to religion; and therefore it will have no more influence upon their eternal salvation. Genuine religion is wholly practical: grace is but the principle of virtue and good works. Your religion can be of no value, I should rather say, you have no real religion, if it do not enter into life with you, if it do not pervade and animate all your actions.

A very great part of that conduct by which your eternal happiness may be promoted, consists in transacting your ordinary business in a proper and virtuous manner. There is scarcely an action of your lives so insignificant as not either to promote or to obstruct your salvation. The most trivial and common actions may be performed right, or they may be performed wrong. We should all, therefore, maintain an uninterrupted care to perform all the actions of our lives aright. If we maintain this care, we shall forward our everlasting happiness, by the very same actions by which we obtain or enjoy present things. Many of the common actions of life are far from being trivial or unimportant in a religious and moral view. It is by living in society, and employing ourselves in the ordinary business of it, that we can find opportunity for many of our most important duties, for many of the principal functions of the spiritual and christian life: and by seizing these opportunities, and using them properly, we shall most effectually provide for eternity. It is from the ordinary occurrences of life, that we find occasion for the principal exertions of those virtues which regard either ourselves, our neighbour, or our God: and these virtues comprehend the whole of our duty, and constitute that holiness which is the necessary preparation for heaven.

The observations which have been hitherto made, abundantly shew the importance of that view of religion which I am endeavouring to give you; they likewise explain it in some measure: for the more particular explication of it, which was the second thing proposed, let us briefly point out, how the three great branches of our duty now mentioned, interweave themselves with the ordinary actions and employments of life.

1. There are many duties which we owe properly to ourselves, for practising which we find the opportunity in the course of ordinary life.

As long as we dwell in these earthly tabernacles, some foresight and diligence about the necessaries and conveniences of the present life, is unavoidable. God doth not forbid it: he hath not made it inconsistent with the pursuit of future happiness. None would wish to starve or to be naked: God doth not require you to court these hardships. You may be diligent; you ought to be diligent in your callings: God not only allows, but commands you to be diligent; *not slothful in business* (Rom. xii. 11.), is a precept of divine authority; there are many similar precepts: God promises his blessing to diligence, and gives frequent encouragement to it. That man sins, and obstructs his own progress to heaven, who is idle in his station. Religion renders industry a duty towards ourselves, enforced by the authority of God: by reflecting on this obligation to it, and allowing it to have some influence upon us, we shall convert every exertion of industry in our trade or profession into an act of obedience to God: and if, while we are prompted to industry by the instincts and prospects of the animal life, common to all men, we be also impelled to it by a regard to the commandment of God, this additional motive cannot fail to quicken our industry, to increase it, and to render it more successful.

God requires that the immediate objects of your industry should not engross your whole hearts; that you should not imagine the attainment of them sufficient to make you happy; that amidst your labour for them you should maintain a sense that there are things of infinitely greater consequence, to be either obtained or lost. Religion requires you to carry these sentiments through life with you: they

they will not enfeeble your industry, they will only restrain it from forced and unnatural exertions; they will be no hindrance to its regular and healthful motions, they will only prevent its running into distorted and convulsive agitations; they will not destroy that eagerness which gives spirit and perseverance to your endeavours, they will only extinguish that anxiety, sollicitude, and carefulness, which, while they make you neglect eternal things, often render you at the same time incapable of pursuing present things in the most effectual manner, and create immediate vexation of spirit, for which no success can make amends. In a word, such sentiments carried through life, and acted upon, will only sanctify your industry, and render it conducive to your future happiness, while it continues as subservient as ever, or even becomes more subservient, to your present interest.

We are so formed as to be capable of enjoyment in those earthly things which we possess. God doth not contradict our constitution by his laws; he doth not require us to become insensible even to the lowest pleasures. All men eat and drink: they are among the most common actions of your lives; yet religion is concerned in them. If, in eating and drinking, you are luxurious, intemperate, or debauched, you swallow down poison to your immortal souls: but if you eat and drink temperately and in moderation, without overvaluing or repining for the pleasures which you have not, or abusing those which you have, avoiding sensuality and excess; if you eat and drink in that degree which promotes the health and strength of the body, which renders it fitter for the service of the soul, which is decent, and becomes a reasonable creature, made for much higher enjoyments; then you serve God every time you eat and drink; you nourish your souls unto eternal life, by the very same actions by which you daily nourish your bodies.

It is a duty which we owe to ourselves, to preserve sobriety of mind, composure of spirit, a freedom from all violent passions, humility, and self-government. It is in the ordinary employments of life that we find both temptations to violate this temper, and occasions for exercising it: it is only by maintaining it amidst all the occurrences of common life, all the

calls, and vicissitudes, and tumults of business, that we can obey those divine precepts which enjoin it. You are engaged in the pursuit of some considerable advantage: you have now an opportunity of curbing the violence of your desires, of keeping them from possessing your whole souls: this is incumbent on you, and by this you shall prepare yourselves for that happy state which excludes every ungoverned passion. In the course of your occupations you meet with unexpected incidents, sudden turns, perplexities, and intricacies: you are called to avoid being discomposed by them; this will be a preparation for the superior regions of perfect serenity and peace, at the same time that it prevents present uneasiness, and even fits you for the most proper management of your worldly business.

In this world, objects frequently occur which tend to draw us from the path of life. They meet us in the scenes of business, and in the hours of relaxation and amusement, in company, in solitude, in every situation. Continual circumspection and watchfulness against their drawing us into the ways of death, by seducing us into sin, is a duty which we owe to our own souls: and it is a duty which we must put in practice every day, and every hour, in every place, and in every condition. We must carry this temper through life with us, we must preserve and exercise it in all the various circumstances in which at any time we stand, else we cannot persist stedfastly in the narrow way that leads to heaven.

2. In like manner, in the ordinary business of our lives we shall find the most frequent and the best opportunities of performing our several duties to our fellow-men. Religion requires us to embrace these opportunities: and by embracing them, and performing the duties suitable to them, we shall serve God, and please him, and contribute to the salvation of our own souls.

You spend the day in merchandize, in labour, in the business of your calling whatever it is: you must carry your religion along with you; you must exercise it all the time you are thus employed. You may do your work either honestly and uprightly, or the contrary. If you deceive those with whom you have dealings, or defraud them, or injure them, you injure your own souls much more,

you

you move a step forward to destruction. But if in every part of your business without exception, you act justly and equitably, and deal with integrity and faithfulness; you walk before the Lord, while you seem to be only busy in your worldly calling; you advance in your journey towards heaven, while you seem to be only going round in the circle of employments which belong to this mortal state. The shop, the exchange, the occupations of active life, form the only theatre on which the virtues of justice, fidelity, and honesty can be practised; and without constantly practising these, you can have no religion. These virtues tend to secure the confidence of men, and to promote your worldly prosperity; and by the uniform practice of them, you likewise *lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through, nor steal.* (Matt. vi. 19.)

In the train of life, in the intercourse of society and business, some person does you undesigned harm, or an intended injury. This is the time when you have it in your power to exercise, and by exercising to improve, patience, meekness, forbearance, forgiveness, kindness. It is only by exercising them in such circumstances, by making them to run through all the actions to which such circumstances give occasion, that you can shew yourselves to *be the children of the Highest* (Luke. vi. 35.), and heirs of the kingdom of life. If, on the occasions mentioned, you, on the contrary, indulge bitterness, anger, wrath, malice, revenge; if you give way to the expressions of these dispositions in the communications of company, or the connexions of business; you show yourselves alienated from the gentle spirit of true religion, and you render yourselves fit for the society of those fallen angels in whom malevolent passions reign.

You go into company, you enter into conversation: the characters and the conduct of others become the topics. This is the situation in which you are called to make candid and favourable constructions, to vindicate aspersed innocence, to clear up misconstrued virtues, to apologize for exaggerated failings, to *speake the truth in love.* (Eph. iv. 15.) You have opportunity for these duties every day: it is in the relaxations of society, in the turns of

common conversation, that you find the opportunity; and they are essential and important duties of religion. If instead of performing them, you, in your gayest meetings, and most unreserved talk, defame, slander, revile, or backbite, you need make no pretensions to true religion in your closets or at church. *If any man among you, says the apostle James, seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.* (James, i. 26.) He that bridleth not his tongue from offences so heinous as these, doth the office of Satan, and by the employment of those which he reckons his disengaged hours, and for which he thinks that little account will be required of him, entitleth himself to a portion with Satan.

In the course of your employments, by the events which cast up in the train of your ordinary business, you have opportunities of returning good to your benefactors, of doing services to those who have done you evil, of supplying the wants of the poor, by employing them, or by other means which are in your way, of supporting the friendless, of producing concealed merit, or of doing some other good office to those with whom you meet. Different employments afford different means of doing the same good offices to others, or opportunities of doing different good offices; but every employment affords some means, and some opportunities. It is a great part of the duty which God requires of you, to embrace and improve these opportunities: this is to *do good, to be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate*; by this you *lay up in store for yourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that you may lay hold on eternal life.* (1 Tim. vi. 18, 19.)

I cannot mention particularly all the ways in which true holiness will enter into social life, and exert itself towards others, in all the varied scenes and complicated situations which turn up in the course of ordinary business. In addition to the instances already given, I shall only observe in general, that every act of proper behaviour which we show as parents, as children, as masters, as servants, as we belong to a particular occupation or profession, as we are placed in a particular relation, is a real act of holiness, pleasing to God, and conducive to our eternal hap-

happiness. On the other hand, every instance of improper behaviour in any of these relations or situations, displeases God, and retards our progress to heaven. When we contemplate religion as thus concerned in our whole behaviour towards others, as either observed or violated in all our social actions, how extensive does it appear to be? how uninterrupted are our opportunities for it? how constant should be our attention to it? how often do we neglect or transgress its obligations, when we imagine our actions perfectly indifferent, and removed wholly out of the province of religion?

3. We must likewise carry piety along with us through the whole course of our lives; we must exercise godliness in all our occupations: else we have no true religion, nor can be fit for the enjoyment of God. This is an important part of our subject, the illustration of which we cannot now enter upon.

S E R M O N II.

Religion intimately connected with ordinary Life.

PSALM CXvi. 9.

I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.

RELIGION considered in its just extent, contains two sorts of duties, the duties of piety, and those which regard the actions of the natural and social life. Both are essential to it. But men shew a strong propensity to consider the former as unconnected with life, and the latter as unconnected with religion, and by a misconception of both sorts equally, though in different respects, to disunite religion from the occupations of common life. It proceeds from a partial view of both these; and it tends to render our practice of both defective.

Men confine their idea of piety to the acts of immediate worship; they consider it not as what should, as what can enter into common life; they think that they serve God, only when they are worshipping him, and disengaged from their worldly employments. Conceiving religion in so false and contracted a light, they necessarily regard the actions of the natural and social life, as without the

verge of religion, as not requiring or admitting any regulation or direction from its influence.

In consequence of these partial and imperfect conceptions, some have withdrawn from the business of life, that they might give up themselves wholly to devotion, or have become negligent in their lawful calling, as interrupting their application to religion; and many more, intent on their worldly employments and interests, and regarding all acts of devotion as encroaching upon these, neglect them totally, or crowd them into as little time as possible: *God is not in all their thoughts.* (Psal. x. 4.)

Persons of a serious turn, and sensible of the importance of piety, will apply to what they consider as belonging to it. But if they imagine acts of immediate worship to be all that belongs to it, their application will be of little value. They will be punctual in performing these: but they will think that when they have performed these, they have done all that piety requires, and are abundantly religious; and too often they imagine that, if they spend some hours of the day in devotion, they may do, through the rest of it, whatever they please, whatever their vicious passions prompt them to; at least they are not sufficiently careful to avoid doing so. Thus their religion becomes a mere round of external services, attended perhaps with transient and unmeaning emotions of soul, but not a preparation for the right conduct of life; and they bear in themselves that character of corruption, which the apostle assigns to the men of the last days, *having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.* (2 Tim. iii. 5.)

Whether men have a regard to religion, or have not, if the actions of the natural and social life be considered as without the province of religion, the necessary consequence will be, that men shall think themselves at liberty to perform them, not according to the rules of religion. Whenever we look upon the ordinary actions of common life as indifferent, whenever we forget that there is either virtue or vice in almost every one of them, we are in great danger of indulging vice and contracting guilt in the performance of them. Whenever we allow ourselves to imagine that these actions have no influence on our salvation,

we shall be ready to do them in such a manner as must obstruct our salvation.

Of the three classes of duties which are incumbent upon us, those which regard ourselves, and those which regard other men, are too often considered as little connected with religion, and are, for that reason, reckoned such as may be in some measure neglected without great danger to our salvation. I have therefore shown that our habitual behaviour, both towards others, in the various situations of common life, necessarily implies good or evil, and promotes or obstructs our everlasting happiness. The other class of duties, those which regard God, and are comprehended under the name of piety, are, on the contrary, often considered as unconnected with the ordinary business of life. In opposition to this mistake, I now proceed to show, that we must carry piety along with us through the whole course of our lives, that we must exercise godliness in all our occupations; else we can have no true religion, nor be fit for the enjoyment of God in heaven.

We may acquire some lively impressions of God, in retirement, or in the ordinances of worship; but if these impressions do not remain with us and actuate us, when we enter into the world, and all the time we are conversant in the world, they are of no moment. Religious affections may be nourished in the retreats of devotion, as a child is fed within doors: but it is in the open air, and by the bustle of exercise, that the child acquires and shows health, vigour, and agility; and it is in the field of the world, and by being introduced into its several occupations, that the religious affections obtain and display strength, firmness, and energy. It is in the world they are put to the trial, it is there we find opportunities for exerting them, and it is by being exerted there that they are improved into a commanding temper of piety.

There is no situation in life, which gives not scope for some exercise of godliness, and which requires it not, if we would not be wanting to our duty. Piety, or a regard to God, is a vital spirit which may run through, and ought to run through, all the virtues which respect either ourselves or others, to animate, to model, and direct them. It is not excluded from any place or condition which admits any virtue whatever; it cannot be dispensed with from any such place or

condition, but that virtue loses much of its lustre, and is even in danger of perishing.

Love to God is an affection which does not spend itself in silent admiration, or warm feelings: it is fit to enter into life, and to act in life. We are commanded to keep ourselves *in the love of God* (Jude, ver. 21.): it is a temper which may possess us as constantly, and influence us as regularly, as affection to a parent or a friend. It should influence us through life, in the whole of our behaviour, in a manner similar to that in which affection to a parent or a friend operates on such parts of our behaviour as have a respect to them. Love to God does not display itself so much, or ascertain its sincerity and ardour so unexceptionably, by any emotions inwardly felt, or by any raptures of devotion, as by its effects upon our actions; by making us delight to obey and please God in every part of our behaviour; by making us willing to relinquish what we most fondly desire, or to incur what we most vehemently dread, rather than offend him in committing any sin, or neglecting any duty; by alluring us to the imitation of all those moral attributes which render God the object of our love; and by cherishing benevolence, and drawing out beneficence to all men, who are the children of our Father in heaven. Love to God will find opportunities for some of these exercises of it, in all our worldly business, in all the actions and events of common life: and if any man neglect these exercises of it, whenever he finds opportunity for them, *how dwelleth the love of God in him?* (1 John, iii. 17.) His heart is void of it, though liveliness of imagination or a constitutional warmth of affection may lead him to presume that his love to God is ardent.

Reverence of God is not more analogous to the love of God, in itself, than in its effects upon our ordinary conduct. It is not exercised only when we set ourselves to contemplate and celebrate his greatness: we may be, and we ought to be, *in the fear of the Lord all the day long.* (Prov. xxiii. 17.) If we have any reverence of God, it will shew itself every hour in our most common behaviour; in the shade of solitude, amidst the temptations of society, the cares of business, and the relaxation of amusements, in every situation, it will make us to *stand in awe, and not sin* (Psalm. iv. 4.); it will

prompt us to act in a manner worthy of the presence, the majesty, and the perfections of God.

Gratitude is due to God for the blessings which we receive from him. The events of ordinary life furnish us with constant subjects of gratitude. You eat your daily food; you find yourselves in health; you receive the price of your labour; you obtain something which you desired; you prosper in your way: your duty in all these situations, the apostle Paul points out, *In every thing give thanks; be grateful, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus, concerning you.* (1 Thess. v. 18.) The exercise of gratitude is not confined to professed acknowledgments of the mercies which we have received, in praise and thanksgiving, in private or public devotion. The world also is a field for the exercise of gratitude. It is exercised whenever it implants in the heart a new motive to abstinence from sin and hatred of it, whenever it warms the soul with additional alacrity in doing good, and makes us take greater pleasure in it. These exercises of gratitude should be diffused through life, as much as the blessings are, which demand our gratitude; they should influence us as often as we are engaged in any action which can imply either good or evil: and what one action of our lives does not imply them?

Common life is the acknowledged sphere of resignation to the will of God. Piety exerting itself in resignation, is the proper root, and the only firm support of many of those duties to ourselves, the operation of which through the occurrences of common life, either has been already delineated, or may easily be traced; composure, for instance, amidst the tumults and fluctuations of the world, tranquillity in the uncertainty of its prospects, contentment and self-enjoyment under its disappointments, fortitude in the view of its dangers. If these virtues are nipt off from piety, they become puny, and wither, and die. They must be practised through life; but they cannot be practised except the exertions of a pious temper be twisted, as it were, with all the acts of them, to give them strength. All the events of life are uncertain; we are often in adversity, our favourite designs are disappointed, our dearest comforts are taken from

us, we become interested about trifles, and they fail us: we cannot perform the duties which we owe to ourselves in these seasons, without deriving aid from piety. These are the seasons which demand the practice of resignation, submission, and trust in God: these are the seasons in which we must put forth all our strength to retain and exercise these pious principles, else we shall fall into the sins of peevishness, discontent, repining, murmuring, anxiety, and solicitude.

Piety requires subjection to the authority of God, as well as submission to his providence. A sense of his authority will produce a constant disposition to obey his laws. But his laws are nothing else but rules for the particulars of our behaviour in all the various circumstances of human life: there is not a situation in which we can be placed, that is without the verge of their direction; there is not a situation in which our conduct will not be affected by our having a regard to God's supreme authority, or by our failing in that regard.

God is not an unconcerned spectator of the behaviour of reasonable beings; he trieth their hearts, he weigheth all their actions, he approveth, or he disapproveth them. A sense of this, a prevailing respect to his judgment, a contempt of the opinions of all the world when opposed to it, is an important part of piety, and a part of it for exercising which the state of this world gives continual opportunity. In this world, we see vice practised, and hear it justified; we find virtue neglected, and even turned into ridicule: the immediate pleasures and advantages of sin disguise its horrors; the present uneasinesses and inconveniencies to which virtue sometimes exposes men, eclipse its beauty; corrupt fashion seems to alter the measures of right and wrong behaviour; the promiscuous distribution of outward things renders us inattentive to the opposite natures and the opposite consequences of righteousness and iniquity. Such situations frequently occur in the train of ordinary life; and they give opportunity for exerting a supreme regard to the unerring judgment of God, who can see through every disguise, who cannot be imposed upon by the most plausible pretences, whose judgment is always according to truth. (Rom. ii. 2.) This regard is exerted when, in the whole tenour of our

lives, we maintain an abhorrence of all evil, and the love of all goodness, and persist invariably in avoiding the one and pursuing the other, uninfluenced by the false opinions of men, or the irregular appearances of the world, and valuing only the approbation of God.

Piety leads us to the imitation of God ; but all that is enjoined us under the idea of imitating God, consists in the right performance of the several actions of common life, particularly of the social life. It consists in our *loving our enemies, doing good to them that hate us, blessing them that curse us, praying for them which despitefully use us and persecute us, giving to every man that asketh of us, and lending, causing no man to despair.* (Matt. v. 42. 48. Luke, vi. 27. 36.) It consists in *putting away all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, with all malice, and being kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, and walking in love.* (Eph. iv. 31, 32. v. 1, 2.) It consists in *purifying ourselves* (1 John, iii. 3.), and *being holy in all manner of conversation.* (Pet. i. 15.) It is only in the course of our ordinary conduct, and amidst the temptations which occur in society, that we can have scope for these exertions of a godlike disposition.

In a word, all the affections which belong to a temper of piety, unite their force to restrain us from doing evil, and to excite us to do good, in all the varied situations of common life. Every pious affection shows itself by suitable expressions in the offices of devotion ; but no pious affection is completed by these immediate expressions of it : there are likewise active exertions of piety, which run through the whole of our ordinary behaviour. Every regard to God, in a manner peculiar to itself, inclines or urges us to all the duties of life, that is, to the right performance of all, even our most common actions.

Devout persons have often recommended it as highly beneficial, to mix acts of immediate worship, silent ejaculations of adoration, thanksgiving, prayer, confession, or repentance, with our ordinary employments ; and have justly remarked that, unobserved by men, and without any interruption of these employments, we may find time and opportunity for them in the busiest scenes of

life, and even in the midst of our innocent amusements. This is a proper and very advantageous practice ; *and yet show I unto you a more excellent way* (1 Cor. xii. 31.) : piety may be, and ought to be, still more intimately mixt and incorporated with our ordinary employments ; they ought all to be constantly carried on under the restraints which religion imposes, and by the principles which it inspires. To carry them on in this manner, will be to come up to the full import of the descriptions of a life of virtue uniformly pursued under religious impressions, which the scripture gives, when it speaks of good men as *setting the Lord always before them* (Psal. xvi. 8.), *acknowledging him in all their ways* (Prov. iii. 6.), *walking before the Lord, or walking with God.*

The gospel having brought us acquainted with the Son of God, requires faith in him. Faith in Christ may be considered, either as a firm belief of what he has taught us, or as a dependance on his atonement and mediation for our acceptance with God, notwithstanding the demerit of our sins and the imperfection of our holiness. Considered in both lights, faith is a principle fit to run through our whole lives, and to mix with all the most ordinary actions of them.

All the truths which Christ hath taught us in the gospel, are motives to the practice of holiness ; they are constantly proposed in Scripture, as incitements both to holiness in general, and to the several particular virtues. The faith which the gospel requires, is not a mere assent to these truths : it implies such a lively impression, and such a permanent sense of them, as may form our whole temper to holiness, and influence all our actions. A temper of holiness consists in the strength of good affections, and in purity from vicious passions ; good affections are excited when their objects are brought into our view, and placed in a striking light ; they are strengthened when their objects are brought often into view, and attentively considered : the truths of religion set these objects of good affections in the most striking lights, and a firm belief of the truths of religion keeps these objects constantly in our view, and fixes our attention upon them ; and thus renders the good affections habitually prevalent in our hearts. It is this same belief,

lief, likewise, that presents to our minds all those considerations which tend to counteract vicious passions, and to purify us gradually from them. Every action proceeds from some motive, without which neither would the action be done, nor that affection, which is its immediate principle, be supported: every good action proceeds from some religious motive, from some truth urging us to the practice of it; it is faith that suggests this motive, and it must suggest it in the moment in which the action is to be done. True faith keeps all the principles of religion, which can in any way influence our conduct, which can either restrain us from doing evil, or prompt us to do good, in a continual readiness to occur to us, whenever we have occasion for them. We have occasion for them in every situation in which we have occasion to act. Faith, therefore, must attend us, and suggest the principles of religion as motives to action, in every place, and in every one of our various occupations. It must run through our whole conduct, bestowing vigour and stability on all our virtues, *purifying our hearts* (Acts, xv. 9.), *working by love* (Gal. v. 6.) producing *good works*. (Tit. iii. 8.—James, ii. 14. 26) It alone can furnish the weapons with which we may combat all the alluring prospects which sin sets before us, and all the difficulties and dangers to which virtue may expose us; and of these weapons we have need every moment; *this*, says John, *is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith*: (1 John, v. 4, 5.) to overcome the world, our faith must operate as often as we are conversant with the world. It is when faith thus exerts itself in restraining us from sin, in cherishing good affections, in exciting us to the several duties of life, that we may be said to *walk by faith* (2 Cor. v. 7.). The Apostle Paul exhibits his own faith in this very attitude, when he says, *The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God*. (Gal. ii. 20.)

Faith, considered as a dependence upon Christ, seems not to mingle so congenially with the ordinary actions of life: yet it is truly fit to mingle with them in a very great degree. Whenever we reflect that we have committed any sin, and feel remorse for it (and, in the present frail state of man, how often must this happen to every sensible heart?) it is faith exerting

itself in dependence upon Christ, that mitigates our sorrow, and restores our cheerfulness. Whenever we are conscious of a good action, when the consciousness of it gives us *good hope* (2 Thess. ii. 16.), it is by trust in Jesus Christ that this hope is supported, and preserved from sinking beneath the sense of our imperfection and guilt. It is dependence upon Christ, that encourages us to amend what we know to be wrong in ourselves, and in our former conduct; for it is dependence upon him, that makes us to feel that it shall not be in vain: and while we are imperfect creatures, a great part of right conduct must consist in endeavours to do the several actions of life better than we have done them in former instances. In general, hopes and fears of futurity not only arise in the hours of reflection, but often influence us in the actions of life; and, in a Christian, hope and fear can never be wholly separated from exercises of faith towards Jesus, who *delivereth us from the wrath to come* (1 Thess. i. 10.), and *through whom eternal life is the gift of God to us*. (Rom. vi. 23.)

The gospel reveals to us the Holy Spirit also, and requires us to exercise dependence on the assistance which he is sent on purpose to impart. To be convinced that this dependence should run through our whole lives, and mingle with all our actions, and to understand how it may do so, we need only recollect the end for which the assistance of the Spirit is given. It is given for our sanctification; it is given to be a principle of purity, and virtue, and activity in well-doing.—Through the whole course of our life, and in all its occupations, we have opportunities of avoiding evil, and of doing good; and whenever we exert ourselves in either, it should be with dependence on the aids of the divine Spirit. We should have an habitual trust in these, similar to that habitual sense which good men entertain of the dependence of their nature and all their powers upon God. If we have such trust, it will lead us, not only to recognise, at stated times, the Holy Spirit as the author of our virtues, and to pray to God for his aids; but also to look up to him in the very moment of action, and, by the consciousness of the presence and support of so powerful an assistant, to invigorate ourselves in every

hour of langour, and to encourage ourselves in every moment of temptation and difficulty, that we may, without weariness or intermission, put forth all the strength which he imparts to us, in resisting all the attacks of sin, and practising every virtue, as we find the opportunity. It is this habitual and active improvement of the divine aids, that the Apostle recommends to the Galatians—*This I say, then, walk in the Spirit* (Gal. v. 16.); the expression implies, that we should have the whole tenour of our ordinary behaviour regulated by the influence of the spirit of God.

Thus I have endeavoured to represent religion to you, in its connexion with ordinary life. I have shown the importance of this view of it; and I have explained it, by pointing out the opportunities which ordinary life affords for the practice of religion, and by tracing the influence of religion on our behaviour in these several opportunities. Religion consists not in our withdrawing from the occupations of the present world, but in our being conversant in them after a virtuous manner. The apostle Paul, in describing that goodness which the gospel was revealed on purpose to enforce, reduces it to the three heads of virtue which we have now illustrated, *that we live soberly, righteously, and godly*, and he adds, *in this present world* (Tit. ii. 12.): the addition is not vain; it suggests the very idea which I have made it my business to unfold; it intimates that we have no religion, no Christianity, if we do not carry it into the world with us, and exercise it in all the circumstances of life. The apostle James gives us the same view of religion, though in a different manner of expression; *Pure religion, and undefiled before God, even the Father, is this: to visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.* (Jam. i. 27.) The world contains temptations to vice, and it presents opportunities of doing good in all the ways of virtuous exertion; both occur at all times, and in all conditions; and pure religion consists in guarding against the former, and embracing and improving the latter, whenever they occur. When our Saviour was most solicitous for the happiness of his disciples; when he had the most immediate view of the dangers to which they were exposed

in a world that *hated them*, as it had *before hated him* (John, xvii. 14.), when he declared that *they were not of the world* (ver. 16.); even then he said to his Father, *I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil.* (Ver. 15.) It was by being sent forth into the world, and acting in it, that they could be useful, and that they could become happy.

The example of our Saviour, as well as the intimations of Scripture, sets religion in this point of view. Through all the early part of his life, he laboured in Joseph's vocation, as a carpenter: he left it not till the season came when he was called to enter on another vocation, inconsistent with it, and which required all his time. Even after that, he still lived in the world, mixed in society, and conversed with men, *was in all points tempted like as we are* (Gal. ii. 20.); and in this situation continued to be *without sin* (Heb. iv. 16.), exhibited an example of every virtue in perfection, and by that example shewed mankind, in what manner religion should exert itself in the several occurrences of common life. It is for the same purpose, that the lives and actions of good men are recorded in Scripture; it is to let us see, how they exercised their religion in the scenes of action and in secular employment: and the wisdom of God, by delivering a great part of the Scripture in the form of history, has provided for recording so great a number and variety of examples, that in them we may observe the operation of religion in almost every possible condition and juncture of human life. If you be not religious and virtuous in active life, in whatever station you fill, in whatever occupation you follow, it is your own fault, not the fault of your situation: religion and virtue may be incorporated with the business of every lawful calling; these have actually been incorporated together in the practice of many of your fellow-men. The spirit of true religion, and the spirit of worldly business, are not repugnant, like a drop of water and a drop of oil, which repel each other, and refuse to mingle; they may be rendered like two drops of mercury, which run together, and form one drop. The improvement and happiness of our souls is most effectually promoted, when all our worldly occupations are rendered subser-

vient

vient to it: our present interests will likewise be best secured, when all our endeavours after them are regulated by religion and virtue.

When the boundaries between religion and ordinary life are misplaced, both must be unduly contracted. They are not like two territories separated by a precise limit, but like territories, which, besides the parts that lie in this manner distinct, have many fields in common, or connected by mutual servitudes, so that they can be cultivated and improved only by united efforts. It is sometimes said, that God has reserved the Lord's day for himself and his service, and that he has given us the other six days of the week for ourselves. This manner of speaking is inaccurate, and has too much a tendency to disguise the connexion between religion and common life. The Lord's day, God has in some sense reserved peculiarly to himself; on it we ought to abstain from our worldly occupations; but its exercises are not unrelated to these occupations; they are designed to prepare us for the right and virtuous management of them, and should be performed with this view. The other six days, God has allowed us for our worldly occupations; but not exclusively of serving him: for in these very occupations we ought to serve God every hour of all the six days. We do serve him in them, whenever we carry them on in a virtuous manner. By thus carrying them on, we promote our salvation, though we should not at all times explicitly intend to promote it by them. But it will render our worldly occupations the more subservient to our salvation, for it will contribute to our practising them aright, that throughout the whole course of them we preserve a solicitude for our salvation, and frequently exert actual desires of promoting it by means of the labours of our station. Thus shall we be possessed of an habitual good intention; thus shall we apply a good intention to our most indifferent actions, and direct them all to laudable and worthy ends.

Some have apologized for the multiplication of ceremonies in religion, by asserting, that this multiplies the opportunities of serving God, and the means of promoting our salvation. The apology is frivolous: the observance of ceremonies is neither serving God nor a means of our salvation, except the ceremonies be

of divine appointment; and if they were, yet still the multiplication of ceremonies would multiply our dangers of neglecting his will, and falling into sin, would increase the difficulty of religion; would render many things necessary, which might have been safely omitted, if God had not required them by positive precepts, and would thus prove a snare to our souls. But the ordinary actions of life must necessarily be done; and, by setting ourselves to do them all with a regard to God, and with a view to the improvement and salvation of our souls, we shall, without incurring any new danger or inconvenience, multiply the means of our salvation, increase the number of our virtues, and avoid many vices: we shall render our whole existence one continued act of goodness, religion, and obedience; and we shall be, in all the situations and occurrences of life, pleasing to him whom we are made to please, and in pleasing whom our happiness consists.

To conclude: We are at present in a state of discipline for eternity: every event, every circumstance of this state gives us opportunity for the practice of some virtue; and it is by acting virtuously in every circumstance of this state, that we can be improved in holiness, and become fit for heaven. Our commonest actions are those in which we think religion least concerned, and on which we are apt to bestow the least attention; but of our commonest actions we ought rather to take the greatest care; for they are most frequently repeated; they will therefore form the strongest habits; they will most promote our improvement and our happiness, if they be constantly performed right; but they will most obstruct it, if we indulge ourselves in a custom of performing them wrong.

S E R M O N III.

The old Age of the Righteous honourable.

Prov. xvi. 31.

The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.

THIS is a just aphorism, and beautifully expressed. Old age is, in a figurative and poetical manner, described by one of its concomitants, and by one which does not directly imply any of its

3 K 3 infirmities,

infirmities, but rather is in its very appearance venerable, *the hoary head*, the grey hairs. As hairs are an ornament to the head, the wise man, by an elegant allusion to them, calls old age *a crown of glory*, encircling the head, adorning it, and challenging respect. Grey hairs indicate the decay of nature; but they are notwithstanding an honourable crown, if the man who wears them, *be found in the way of righteousness*. The plain meaning of the maxim is, That the old age of good men is truly venerable, and entitles them to esteem and honour.

In the present discourse, I shall briefly illustrate this maxim; and then deduce some practical reflections from it.

First, I shall illustrate the maxim which Solomon delivers in the text, That good men, who have been allowed a long life, and have spent it in piety and virtue, are honourable in their old age, deserve, and even command esteem.

Nature itself intimates that reverence is due to old age, and has always, both in the rudest and in the most civilized nations, led men very generally to give it reverence. When the young failed in respect to the old, or treated them with contempt, it has ever been considered as a certain mark of great degeneracy of manners. The wise men of all countries have acknowledged that years give one kind of *superiority*, and have inculcated reverence correspondent to it. To enforce the subjection of the younger to the elder, has been a part of the policy of all well regulated states; and in some states, this subjection has been carried very far, and insisted upon in its utmost extent, as indispensably necessary for the order and prosperity of society. In the republic of Israel, God made it the subject of an express law; *Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God; I am the Lord* (Lev. xix. 32.). Elihu followed the dictates of nature and of decency, when he waited till Job and his three friends had spoken, because they were elder than he (Job, xxxii. iv.); and he spoke the language of both, when he said, *I am young, and ye are very old, wherefore I was afraid and durst not show you mine opinion: I said, days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom* (Ver. 6, 7.).

Old age, thus venerable on its own account, cannot fail to become much more venerable when it is *found in the way of*

righteousness. *The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour* (Prov. xii. 26.). True goodness is the greatest ornament of human nature; it is the properest object of approbation, and the justest foundation for esteem; it entitles every person who possesses it, to love and honour. It must therefore be a great ornament to old age, and render it truly respectable and venerable. When the reverence due to a character of true goodness, is added to the reverence due to old age, very high veneration must be the result.

But for the more particular illustration of Solomon's maxim, for the fuller proof that the old age of the virtuous is honourable, let us consider their old age—in relation to the life which has preceded it,—in its own nature,—and in respect of the prospects which it opens.

1. The old age of the virtuous is honourable on account of the life which has preceded it. It is the termination of a wife, a well-spent, and a useful life. Such a life was honourable, and it reflects great glory on the person who has accomplished it.

In a religious and virtuous old man, we behold one who has long been exposed to the temptations of the world, and has overcome them. His virtues have been often put to the trial, and they have stood the trial. Every period of human life has its peculiar difficulties; the man who entered early on a religious and virtuous course, and went forward in it uniformly to old age, has surmounted all these difficulties. In a long life there never fail to be vicissitudes of prosperity and adversity, of joy and sorrow; it is honourable, through all these vicissitudes, to have remained steadfast in the love and practice of goodness. Sincere goodness is always approved by God, who knows the heart: but goodness must be tried, before its sincerity can be fully ascertained in the eyes of men. We justly behold with pleasure, the promising beginnings of goodness in the young; but the most promising beginnings sometimes fail, the blossom is blighted, the fruit comes not to maturity: on this account, we can scarcely avoid mixing some degree of diffidence and reserve with our approbation of the virtues of the young. But the virtuous old man has fully approved himself to men, as well as to God; by many proofs he has rendered it unquestionable, that his goodness is true and genuine: we may pro-
claim

claim his virtues with perfect confidence. Like a veteran, he has long encountered all the dangers of the Christian warfare; in many conflicts his resolution has been displayed, his steadiness manifested, and his inviolable attachment to God and goodness justified. His integrity is proved by the multitude of his triumphs; and they are triumphs full of the truest glory.

By trials, a man's virtue not only shows itself genuine, but also becomes confirmed, vigorous and eminent. It is by exercise that every virtue is improved. The same temptations which endanger our virtues by their assaults, strengthen them when they are resisted. A long life contains many trials; and by every trial in which a man conquers, he is made better. If we devote ourselves to the practice of goodness in our earliest years, and thenceforth persist constantly in it, we must make great progress before we reach old age. A virtuous old person is a person of improved and exalted goodness. All that honour and glory which belongs to goodness, he claims in its highest degree.

Again, A virtuous old age is the termination of a life which has been filled up with worthy and useful actions. When a man has begun early to do good, and lived to old age doing good, his services to God and to mankind must be numerous. He has had many opportunities of virtuous practice; if he has carefully improved them, to what honour is he not entitled? Every day a good man lives, he has greater glory than he had the day before; for he has done greater good. A long life of piety and virtue has contained a great multitude of good actions; each of these actions sends forth a ray of glory, which is reflected back upon him who did it; and when all the scattered rays are collected, and, as it were, twitted into a crown to encircle his hoary head, how glorious is that crown? With what lustre must it shine? How rich and how various an effulgence must it diffuse around him? The sparkling of the diamond is dimness in comparison. The veneration due to virtuous old age, is the aggregate of all our approbations of the many virtuous and useful actions with which the precedent life abounded; and this veneration is heightened and sweetened by the emotions of love and gratitude for the advantages which mankind have derived from so long a series of good offices.

2. The old age of the virtuous is honourable in itself, as well as in its relation to their past life.

This appears in some measure from what has been already said. The character which a pious and virtuous old person exhibits to our view, is that of goodness, genuine, improved, and useful: of all characters the most respectable. This character was acquired by the conduct of the whole life, and therefore naturally turns our eye backward to its course: but when we consider it as already formed, as now possessed in its maturity, and actuating the aged person in all his motions, it is, in itself, and without regard to the life which preceded it, a glorious ornament. In the earlier periods of life, the tenour of a man's virtue is sometimes interrupted, and its brightness tarnished, by the impetuosity of the passions, and the faults into which they precipitate him. Age calms the mind, frees it from turbulent and unruly passions, composes it into a holy serenity, and makes all the virtues of the heart to shine forth, like the sun in the clearest day, unobscured by the clouds of vice.

But not to enlarge on this, In old age, virtue is naturally accompanied by wisdom and prudence, derived from long experience; and by its union with these, its lustre is augmented. *Much experience is the crown of old men, and the fear of God is their glory* (Ecclus. xxv. 6.). Experience is the most powerful teacher; in youth men must be in a great measure destitute of its lights; and in consequence of this, in some cases they must be ignorant, and in other cases they must misjudge: it is when they are advanced in life, that their knowledge becomes extensive, their sentiments just, and their maxims solid. In early life, the violence of the passions often hurries men on rashly to action, without allowing them either leisure or inclination to listen to the voice of reason and the suggestions of prudence. It is when years have rendered the passions less headstrong, and the judgment more mature, that reason is heard, and wisdom acquired. In all the savage nations the old men have, from a fixt opinion of their wisdom, the greatest weight in all public counsels. The experience of age qualifies men for instructing, for advising, for directing. When men are destitute of piety and virtue, their experience is often only skillfulness in vice;

all their wisdom is but cunning, and their maxims but the rules of deceit; at the best, their prudence is confined to the things of this world. By communicating their sentiments to the younger, if they do not corrupt them, they will instruct them only in what regards their temporal interests, and the conduct of civil life. But when a man has grown old in goodness, his maxims even for the present life are corrected, and his prudence sanctified, by religion: and his prudence is not confined to earthly things, his experience is great in religious matters likewise: he has spiritual wisdom, and is fit to lead others forward in the paths of righteousness. He knows the various frailties of human nature, for he has long experienced them; and he can prescribe the properest remedies for removing or alleviating them. He has had opportunity of observing the several wiles of Satan, and deceits of sin; and is acquainted with the best defences against them. He has long studied the ways of God towards man; he understands the language of the various dispensations of Providence; and he can teach others how to improve them. He has learned the true value of things, and found the vanity of the world; and can check those gay ideas and sanguine hopes of youth, which, when they are indulged without any check, overwhelm men with bitter disappointment. It is honourable for a man to be knowing in a useful business: the virtuous old man has the honour of being knowing in that business which is the most important to every man. We respect those who are able to direct and counsel us: the aged saint is able to direct and counsel us in our chief concern, the improvement of our immortal souls: the respect which we owe him, is proportioned to the moment of this object.

In old age, the strength necessarily decays, the body becomes weak and feeble, infirmities are multiplied. It is only the most worthless, or the most thoughtless, that can on this account despise an aged person. From all of other characters, the infirmities of age will command the tenderest sympathy; and this sympathy, far from extinguishing respect, will mix with it, soften its feelings, and make it to shew its power by the most attentive care to avoid whatever could give uneasiness to the aged person, and by the most assiduous endeavours to mitigate his

distresses and promote his comfort. When the infirmities of age are hastened or increased by a life of debauchery and vice, they do render a person despicable; but the bodies of good men are worn out in the practice of virtue, in the service of God and mankind, and the improvement of their own souls. Their infirmities themselves are therefore honourable; they are like the wounds which the soldier has received in fighting bravely for his country, and in which he glories. They lead us only to regret the frailty of nature, which permits not the world longer to enjoy a deserving man. When amidst the infirmities of age, a person affects the levities, or betrays a remaining attachment to the impurities of youth, it is at once ridiculous and shocking; all respect vanishes; we can scarcely help giving full scope to indignation and contempt: but his corruption, not his decrepitude, is the object of these sentiments; the contrary sentiments are those which virtue inspires. Under the infirmities of old age, no wonder that the vicious sink; but they give the virtuous an opportunity of shewing the triumphs of religion and goodness, in a new and striking light: a person supporting these infirmities with patience, amidst them all preserving composure, serenity, and cheerfulness; is he more venerable, or more amiable? He does honour to the power of religion; and he is honoured by his possessing religion in such power, and exerting it with such splendour.

The old age of good men is honourable in respect of the prospects which attend it. These are the principal causes of that firmness and cheerfulness under their infirmities, which, we have just now seen, procures them reverence; and these reflect honour upon them in other ways.

Old age is the termination of this mortal life; but to good men it is the immediate prelude to immortality. A person who early began to follow holiness (Heb. xii. 14.), and has persisted in it to an advanced age, is ripe for the glory and happiness of heaven.

It is of this man that Eliphaz beautifully observes, *Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in, in his season* (Job, v. 26.). Like the corn of a fertile field, he has grown up gradually, pleasant in the sight of God and man, and reached full maturity; and now he is ready, not to be cut down and cast

cast into the fire like tares, but to be gathered in, removed beyond the reach of all the storms and tempests of this world, and placed in everlasting security and peace.

His hoary head is a natural emblem, and the direct fore-runner of that everlasting crown which he is ready to receive.

Now is his *salvation near*. (Rom. xiii. 11.) His prospects are instantly to take place; and they are the most magnificent and glorious prospects, and built upon the surest foundation. They are ascertained by his past life and his present temper: he has the pleasant consciousness of a well-spent life; he has the comfortable sense of his being at *peace with God through Jesus Christ* (Chap. v. 1.); he has the cheering view of being immediately delivered from every trouble, and every sorrow; he has the elevating hope of a great reward. He knows that his dissolution approaches fast; he perceives it without disquiet or regret; he perceives it with joy; he looks forward to the day of his death, as the birth-day of his eternal life. When the apostle Paul was now an old man, and saw death ready to seize him, even before the natural period, and in one of its most formidable shapes, he declared to Timothy the transporting prospects which lay before him; *I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand; I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me at that day.* (2 Tim. iv. 6, 7, 8.) Every good man has a right to indulge the same prospects; and not to me only, continues the apostle, *but unto all them also that love his appearing*. Can there be truer dignity than what is derived from such sentiments and views? They ennoble the soul. These are thy triumphs, O Religion! Thou enablest thy votaries to despise what others court; to desire what others dread; to rejoice in what overwhelms others with sorrow and dejection: thou raisest them above mortality; thou introducest them into everlasting happiness and glory. The man who has grown old in goodness, is truly great; he can smile on death; he can scorn the king of terrors; he is just about to be advanced to a kingdom, and invested with a crown;

he is quickly going to his God and his Saviour, to be set down with them upon their throne. Can you conceive a more venerable object than a person just ready to enter into heaven? With what respect, with what awe, with what admiration, would you gaze on one of the inhabitants of heaven, if he should revisit this earth, and present himself to your view? In a religious and virtuous old person, you behold a man, who, after a few breaths and pulses more, will be one of them; who already stands in the very gate of heaven, who is on the point of joining the *innumerable company of angels, the general assembly and church of the first born. God the judge of all, the spirits of just men made perfect, and Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant*. This is real honour; it is he who is thus honoured by God, that may be pronounced venerable.

Thus I have endeavoured to illustrate Solomon's assertion, that the old age of the righteous is honourable. Let us now attend to some of the practical reflections which naturally arise from the subject of our discourse.

In general, it gives us a striking view of the excellence of religion, of the importance of true goodness, fit to recommend it to our love, and to engage us in the practice of it. It doubles the honours of age; it renders even its infirmities respectable; it gives joy amidst all its distresses. This is an illustrious display of the power of goodness, a full proof that it is in its nature excellent and honourable. Let us all value and pursue it, as the highest dignity and felicity of our souls. It is the guide and the guard of youth, the defence and the support of old age, the ornament of all the periods of life. It alone can preserve us innocent and blameless in our younger and gayer days, render us useful in our maturity, and give us comfort and hearts-ease, when nothing else can give them, in our decline: it alone can regulate our temper and our conduct in the present life; and it alone can prepare us for happiness in the next, and, by the cheering, the celestial hope of unchangeable felicity beyond the grave, reconcile us to all the vicissitudes of time.

In particular, the maxim which has been illustrated, may be distinctly improved, by the young, and by the old.

It instructs the young in the duty which

which they owe to their elders. Their years give them a superiority, their experience gives them prudence, and, if they have *exercised themselves unto godliness* (1 Tim. iv. 7.), the length of their exercise has rendered them proficient in holiness: these are all natural motives to respect, esteem, and honour. The young sometimes allow themselves to despise the aged for the infirmities of their bodies, and the decays of their activity and strength. This shows always giddiness and inconsideration; often it proceeds from depravity of heart, and is attended with degeneracy of manners. It is to disregard the order of nature, which gives pre-eminence to age; it is to find fault with age for wanting what the constitution of things cannot permit it to have: *The glory of young men is their strength; but the beauty of old men is the grey head.* (Prov. xx. 29.) As years come on, the vigour of youth departs, but it is succeeded by accomplishments more respectable; what time takes from men's bodies, it generally adds to their minds; in proportion as the decay of their strength unqualifies them for executing, their experience and prudence fit them for contriving and advising. The young sometimes conceitedly prefer their own ignorance to the understanding of the ancients; they condemn their counsels, because they are unfruitful to their own taste; they are headstrong, impetuous, impatient of control, and cast off that deference to the judgment of their elders, which would check the violence of their passions, and restrain the impulses of their presumption. *This their way is their folly* (Psal. xlix. 13.). Experience generally leads them to adopt the very maxims which they once rejected with scorn, and convinces them that they would have avoided many errors, miscarriages, and sufferings, if they had been pleased to learn these maxims from the experience of others. It is the law of nature, it is the will of God, that the younger should honour and regard the elder. It is the very condition of our being, that human creatures should be placed under their elders. Children are taught by nature to submit to the instruction, and rely on the advice of their parents and teachers; and, in the succeeding periods of life, it is by observing those who go before us, and learning from them, that we become gradually more

perfect in the several functions of life, often without our reflecting that this is the means by which it happens. God thus trains us up in respect to our elders, and forms us insensibly to that reverence which is due to old age, especially when it is found adorned with piety and virtue; and he requires us to pay it this reverence. *Ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder* (1 Pet. v. 5.), is the injunction of an inspired apostle. Especially reverence such of your elders as are peculiarly related to you: *Children, obey your parents in all things; for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord* (Col. iii. 20.): *honour thy father and mother, that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.* (Eph. vi. 2, 3.)

The subject of this discourse suggests to the young, instructions likewise of a more extensive nature: it urges them to begin early a religious and holy life. It is only when the life has been spent in goodness, that true honour is reflected on the hoary head. Age is venerable in itself; but folly is sufficient to render it despicable; and wickedness is the greatest folly, and renders it even detestable. Honour is due to the aged; but by their crimes, they may forfeit their claim to honour. Would you establish your claim to honour, when you shall arrive at old age? be good betimes; begin early, and persist steadily. When the life has been spent in virtue, that virtue will shine mature and perfect in old age; but old age is not the season for beginning to be virtuous: when *the evil days* are already come, and *the years* in which thou hast no pleasure, when *the sun*, and *the light*, and *the moon*, are already darkened, and *the clouds return after the rain*; when *the keepers of the house tremble*, and *the strong men bow down themselves*, and *the grinders cease because they are few*, and *those that look out of the windows be darkened*, and *the doors are shut in the streets*, and *the sound of the grinding is low*, and *thou risest up at the voice of the bird*, and *all the daughters of music are brought low*, and *fears are in the way*, and *the grasshopper is a burden*, and *desire has failed*, and *the mourners already go about the streets*; then it is too late, by far too late to begin to be virtuous; for *then shall the dust return to the earth as it was*, and *the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.* (Eccles. xii. 1. 7.) It is beautiful to behold the fields in harvest covered

covered with corn ripe for the sickle; but it cannot be beheld, except the corn has been sown in the spring. Youth is the spring of life: *Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth.* Then, if you live to be old, your grey hairs shall be a crown of glory; and then it shall be of little moment to you, whether you live to be old or not; for at whatever age you die, your virtues shall be ripe, and your souls meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. (Col. i. 12.) *Though the righteous be prevented with death, yet shall he be in rest; for honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that is measured by number of years; but wisdom is the grey hair unto men, and an unspotted life is old age; he being made perfect in a short time, fulfilled a long time.* (Wisd. iv. 7, 8, 9, 13.)

In the subject of this discourse, the old are particularly interested.

Are any of you, ye aged, yet strangers to the way of righteousness? Your hoary head is your disgrace. The wicked, *though they live long, yet shall they be nothing regarded, and their last age shall be without honour.* (Wisd. iii. 17.) When a man has lived in sin, and grown old in it, he inherits the iniquities of his youth, and the iniquities of all the successive stages of his life. They have been multiplied as his days; the guilt of them all remains accumulated on his hoary head, the ignominy of them all over-spreads his wrinkled face. By long practice, his vicious habits have become inveterate; they cleave to him, and deform him like a leprosy; they are inwrought into all the faculties of his soul; they have vitiated them so entirely, that often, when he can no longer commit his former sins, he ruminates upon them with pleasure, relates them, and recommends them; and, by thus corrupting the young, merits their contempt and execration, and infallibly incurs the indignation and abhorrence of every person who has a regard either to virtue or to decency. He has no rational sentiments, no comfortable reflections, no cheerful hopes, to relieve the infirmities, to allay the pains, to soften the sorrows of his decline. Having lived depraved and despicable, his soul as degenerate as his body is decrepid; his soul as ready for destruction as his body for corruption in the dust, he dies; either rushing into misery unthinking, as the *sheep are laid in*

the grave (Psal. xlix. 14.), or meeting it with horror, despair, and anguish. *Horrible is the end of the unrighteous generation* (Wisd. iii. 19.)! *When they cast up the accounts of their sins, they shall come with fear, and their own iniquities shall convince them to their face.* (Chap. iv. 20.) At every age, vice is the greatest folly; for at every age men may be hurried in a moment to suffer the punishment of vice; but in old age, vice is perfect madness; for the hoary sinner must quickly be summoned to his doom. How dreadfully dangerous is your state? You have all the sins of a long life to repent of; you have all the habits of a long life to eradicate; and you have no time remaining for it. Your sun is already setting, and you have not yet begun the work of the day; how shall you be able to finish it? Repent immediately; and pray God, *if perhaps thy wickedness may be forgiven thee* (Acts, viii. 22.), and thou become a *branch plucked out of the fire.* (Zech. iii. 2.)

But are you, on the other hand, ye aged, in the way of righteousness? Rejoice, because your age is honourable. It is clearer than the noon-day; you *shine forth*; you are *as the morning*; you are *secure because there is hope*, and may take *your rest in safety.* (Job, xi. 17, 18.) But remember that your period of life, as well as the periods which you have already passed, has its peculiar duties and its peculiar temptations. Therefore the apostle exhorts, *that the aged men be sober, vigilant, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience: the aged women, likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things.* (Tit. ii. 2, 3.) Be careful to practise all the duties, and to resist all the temptations of your condition; thus you *shall bring forth fruit in old age.* (Psal. xcii. 14.) Employ your prudence in enlightening the inexperience of youth; in checking its violence, and preventing its wanderings; at the same time, make great allowance for the gaiety, the ignorance, the eagerness, which are inseparable from youth. You will insinuate your documents most effectually, when you invite the young to listen to them, by the cheerfulness of your hearts, by the sweetness of your manners, and by the candour of your sentiments. Under your growing infirmities, uphold yourselves by the approbation of your consciences;

consciences; by firm confidence in the mercy and munificence of God through Jesus Christ; by the hope of immortality just at hand. Supported by these, you may bear your pains with patience, and meet your decays with resignation. Sully not the honours of your age by peevishness, discontent, or ill humour; manifest the energy of religion by the composure, the meekness, and the wisdom of your demeanour. Draw off your affections more than ever from this world, which you are now so very soon to leave. Be not so busy as heretofore in the pursuit of those earthly things which now can profit you for so very short a moment. Employ more time than ever in retirement and devotion. Examine your past life over and over; renew your repentance for all your sins; if there be in your souls any remaining stain derived from the cares or the pleasures of the world, labour to wash it out; if there be any passion yet irregular, mortify it more completely; if any virtue be still weak, set yourselves to strengthen it; if your former vices have left any evil consequences, repair them as much as possible; if in any duty you have been defective, endeavour to supply what was wanting. Let your thoughts be fixed on the heavenly state, from which you are now separated by so thin a veil; render it familiar to yourselves by frequent meditation; accustom yourselves to its employments, by giving full scope to all the pious, and all the benevolent affections; from the perfect exercise of which a great part of the happiness of heaven will arise.

S E R M O N IV.

The Necessity of Governing the Natural Temper.

PROV. xxv. 28.

He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.

IN the last discourse, I explained the origin and the nature of the variety of tempers which is found among mankind. In this discourse, I propose to evince the necessity of our governing, each his own peculiar temper.

Is it, then, needful to evince the necessity of a man's governing his own tem-

per? Every man acknowledges that all others ought to govern their tempers, and complains of them when they do not. By this, every man acknowledges that the government of the temper is a duty of indispensable obligation. Yet there is a very great need to enforce it; for every man almost pleads a privilege to neglect it in his own particular case. As long as men do this, it never will be practised. It is not our owning a duty to be incumbent upon others, but our perceiving it to be incumbent upon ourselves, that will lead us to the performance of it. That we may perceive how much it is the duty of every one of us, to govern his own temper, let us attend to the ill effects of neglecting to govern it. They are pointed out by an expressive figure in the text: *He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls*; he has no security against abandoning himself to every vice. This is an alarming motive to the government of the temper. If the neglect of it has any tendency to vice, it must have a very strong tendency. The influence of our particular temper runs through our whole life, and mixes with every action of it; the consequences of an ungoverned temper must therefore be very extensive; the whole of our conduct must be vitiated. This observation sets the importance of governing the temper in a very striking light; if it be at all a duty, it is a momentous duty. For evincing that it is a duty, it will be sufficient to show, that the neglect of it leads to vice; and in showing this with the fullest evidence, there will be little difficulty.

Every natural temper is innocent in itself; it may likewise be made conducive to virtue: but every temper is, at the same time, apt to degenerate into some vice. To make the temper subservient to virtue, or even to preserve it innocent, attention, and care in restraining and modelling it, are absolutely necessary; just as the soil requires culture in order to its producing a crop of useful grain: but as the ground, whenever it is not cultivated, runs into wildness, and nourishes useless or noxious weeds; so, that our natural temper may lead us into the vices suited to it, and occasion us all the misery involved in them, nothing is necessary but to leave it to itself, to neglect to rule it. Our becoming abandoned to these vices at

at least, is the necessary consequence of the neglect. The strictest government of the temper, which our imperfection permits, cannot prevent our being seduced by these vices in some instances: where there is no government at all, the man must be enslaved by them.

There is not a single vice to which some turn of temper does not directly tend; and therefore there is not a single vice into which one man or another will not be led, by neglecting to govern his natural temper. This is, in a very great measure, the cause of all the variety of vicious characters which disgrace the human species. Some have been led by particular causes, into courses of vice, from which their natural temper was abhorrent; but the greatest part addict themselves to the vices which most fall in with it. There is some vice which easily falls in with every turn of temper, and unavoidably arises from the indulgence of it.

Need I point out minutely, the vices to which the indulgence of a contracted and selfish temper naturally leads? Will it not be readily acknowledged by all, that vice is the certain consequence of the indulgence? It will be only difficult for the generality to form a conception of a contracted temper so carefully corrected as not to include vice in the very idea of it. Selfishness is a term which we never use in a favourable sense; a certain proof that a propensity to it is very apt to become vicious. The selfish affections are various; they turn to different objects: but it requires the strictest government to prevent a temper founded on the prevalence of any of them, from degenerating into the correspondent vice, ambition, or vanity, or avarice, or sensuality, and the love of pleasure. These are all the names of vices, and of vices which, when they rise to a great height, and are indulged without control, render the characters detestable, in which they are the leading principles. We regard pride with a somewhat less unfavourable eye, than any of the selfish desires; we allow that there are species of it which are innocent, or even virtuous; but some epithet must be applied to mark them; it is an affection so apt to become vicious, and so frequently found in a faulty form, that pride without an epithet always denotes a vice. To its excesses, names are appropriated, expressive of the greatest baseness. A man

naturally turned to pride, without governing his temper, becomes haughty, or arrogant, or insolent. One superciliously despises those with whom he lives; the stateliness of his carriage proclaims how much he reckons them below him; he disdains to take notice of them. Another is perpetually claiming extravagant respect; he is not satisfied with his own opinion of his superiority; he demands that you should own it; he anxiously displays it; he makes a show of his riches before the poor man, and of his pomp before the mean; if you refuse him homage, if you yield it in any degree of moderation, you affront him, and he becomes your enemy. One affects affability and lowliness, but he forces you to feel that he thinks he is condescending very far in treating you as his equal. Another is over-bearing; he reckons you much his inferior; he thinks you dependent upon him; perhaps he studies to render you dependent; at any rate he treats you as if you were; he mortifies you with all the petulance of insult. Such characters are detestable; and they arise infallibly from ungoverned pride. Even humility, of all the private affections the most approveable, if it predominated in the temper, and were put under no regulation, would sink into a feeble, a mean, and an abject spirit, which is blameable in itself, and chills every great and worthy effort of the soul.

It is still less necessary to enter into a long detail of the detestable vices which spring from a temper founded in a propensity to any of the malevolent passions. It will universally be confessed, that such tempers, if not very carefully corrected, must produce characters deservedly odious. They lead to vices which spread misery through society, and which overwhelm the person himself with greater misery than he brings upon those around him. Habitual peevishness, producing fretfulness on every the slightest occasion, putting one out of humour with every person and every thing; creating incessant uneasiness to those who are connected with him, eating out the enjoyment of life, is the natural effect of a temper founded on a propensity to anger, though accompanied with the weakest tone of passion. The same propensity joined to a higher tone of passion, leads to vices of a still more pernicious tendency, to licentious reproaches, extravagant

menaces,

menaces, vehemence, rage, and fury; it harasses inferiors and dependents; it provokes and alienates the dearest friends; it stains conversation with rudeness and brutality; in a moment it precipitates into injuries which can never be repaired, and into crimes which entail bitter repentance on the whole succeeding part of life. But when the propensity is, not to short fits of passion frequently recurring, but to permanent and deliberate anger, the indulgence of it produces the blackest vices: it renders the whole behaviour captious and perverse; it infects every action with harshness and bitterness; it settles into malice; it grows up into envy; it exerts itself in revenge; it breaks forth into rancour; it degenerates into cruelty; it employs power in creating misery, and spreading desolation; it takes occasion even from religion, for persecution and bloody massacre.

But, alas! even those best of tempers in which the kind affections prevail, will be productive of very destructive vices, if they are not governed with care. Every day we meet with persons who have become vicious by indulging a temper of this kind. One man is sociable; he indulges his love of company, and he becomes dissipated, and neglects every material duty of life; he falls into ill company, and he is corrupted. Another is soft in his nature, and cannot bear to disoblige; he falls in with vicious men, to oblige them he grants whatever they are pleased to ask, he consents to what he knows to be wrong, he sinneth with them. Good-nature, it is even commonly observed, exposes a person to dangerous temptations. A sympathizing temper often degenerates into weaknesses greatly blameable: generosity of temper readily shoots up into prodigality and ruinous extravagance; and the warm and affectionate heart needs to be held in with a steady rein, else it will rush forward into unlawful testimonies of kindness, and unrighteous acts of friendship.

In whatever way our temper most disposes the several passions and affections to exert themselves, it will, without regulation, prove the source of peculiar vices. When the propensity to desire renders the temper keen and eager, if we lay it under no restraint; if we be not at pains both to direct it to proper objects, and to moderate the degree of it, it must engage

us in trifling and vicious pursuits; in respect of the object of our pursuit, whether pleasure, profit, or power, it must render us craving and insatiable, ever unsatisfied with what we have obtained, wishing and plotting for more; and in respect of the means of prosecution, it must render us impetuous and violent; regardless of the bounds of right, impatient of every delay and opposition, we shall fret and rage at the disappointment of wishes which ought never to have been formed, and the inefficacy of means which ought never to have been employed. Is the opposite propensity to aversion indulged? Every thing wears a gloomy aspect, and is viewed on its darkest side: we act as if we were resolved never to be pleased; we search for occasions of disgust, regret, and uneasiness, and we find them in every object; every gentle affection is banished from the breast; discontent, fretfulness, and ill-humour, become habitual. A temper of confidence easily degenerates into presumption; it engages a man in impracticable enterprises, and makes him sure of success in them; it makes him look on impossibilities as merely difficulties; he hopes, and he strains every nerve to overcome them; he attempts even the most unlawful means; he is plunged into disappointment when he least thinks of it; hurried into all the vices which disappointment produces in the sanguine, and overwhelmed with anguish proportioned to the elevation of his former hopes. Another gives full scope to the timidity of his natural disposition; he dares not attempt any thing that is worthy, the slightest danger can terrify him into the basest conduct; he falls into all the sins and into all the miseries which belong to the cowardly, the suspicious, the jealous, the cunning, the desponding. The sorrowful cast of mind, become excessive, renders even a man's virtues forbidding, and disposes him to vices which can only torment him. A cheerful temper is amiable: but when it is ungoverned, it is the source of many vicious characters; the man who abandons himself to dissolute mirth and jollity, without regard to the propriety of subjects or of situations; the person who trifles in unceasing levity, incapable of serious thought, or of a moment's sedate behaviour; the insignificant, fluttering in a continual round of gay amusements, at leisure for none of
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the duties of life; the wretch who runs from pleasure to pleasure, and gives himself up to false and riotous joys; all these characters, and many more, spring in a great measure from cheerfulness of temper indulged without control.

When the general tone of the passions is high, it exposes a man to all the vices in their turn, which can arise from the excess of any passion, and most to those which arise from the strength of his ruling passion. When it gives too great sensibility to the temper, it renders a man prone to all the weaknesses which naturally spring from love or hatred, from joy or sorrow, from any of the emotions of the soul, immoderately indulged, according to the different ways in which his sensibility happens successively to be touched. When it produces violence and impetuosity, it needs but an occasion to hurry a person into all the crimes which anger, malice, revenge, extravagant desire, presumptuous hope, or any the most restless passion in human nature, can suggest. If the man who has a keen and ardent temper, turn not to virtue, he must be bold and uncontrollable in all his vices: but to virtue he cannot be supposed to turn, if he have *no rule over his own spirit*; for virtue is always founded in self-government. When, on the contrary, the passions are low and languid, and render a man unfeeling, sluggish, and inactive, if he be at no pains to counteract this disposition, is it possible that he can avoid the sins of omission, the vices of neglect? Of the meltings of compassion, of the efforts of benevolence, of the *labours of love* (1 Theff. i. 3. Heb. vi. 10.), of the fervours of devotion, of the actings of zeal for God and goodness, of all the alacrity and vigorous energies of virtue, he is incapable, until he raise himself above the natural insipidity of his temper. If he may be harmless, he cannot be useful. *Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep* (Prov. xix. 15.); *the slothful bideeth his hand in his bosom, it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth* (Ibid. xxvi. 15.); *his hands refuse to labour* (Ibid. xxi. 25.); *his way is an hedge of thorns*. (Ibid. xv. 19.)

It will not be necessary for our purpose, to examine what are the vices congenial to every one of the varieties of temper, which were formerly pointed out as arising

from the several mental powers, either separately or differently combined together. From the instances already produced, it is sufficiently plain, that every turn of temper leads naturally to some vice or another. To these instances let us however subjoin a very few more. Courage may very readily degenerate into fierceness, reserve into fullness, and openness of temper into such unwariness as betrays the secrets of the interests of the dearest friend. A prudent turn of mind is easily corrupted into cunning; and the smallest propensity to thoughtlessness may terminate in the most destructive rashness and precipitation. Credulity lays a man open to many means of seduction; and a tendency to doubt may grow up into such scepticism as shall enervate every principle of virtue, and annihilate every motive to the practice of it. A firm and steady temper is manly; but if it be ungoverned and undirected, it may produce obstinacy, rendering a man inflexible in his worst actions and designs, irreclaimable in all his vices. The opposite temper can scarcely, by any pains, be kept from producing some degree of fickleness and inconstancy, which is itself a blemish; and if no pains be taken to fix it, it will render a person contemptible and little, incapable of that persevering goodness, which alone can be either useful to men or acceptable to God.

The same temper, it may be farther observed, will lead a man, with equal readiness, into opposite vices in opposite situations. There is an example very common, and very commonly taken notice of. The same littleness of mind renders a man insolent in prosperity, and abject in adversity. A man of this turn obtains a fortune, and becomes rude to his superiors, contemptuous to his equals, and oppressive to his inferiors; he runs into all extravagance, he dissipates his fortune, and he is mean and shameless in his poverty. *Shimei casting stones at David and his servants, going after him, and cursing as he went, calling him a bloody man, and a man of Belial* (2 Sam. xvi. 5, 6, 7.); and Shimei, a few days after, on a reverse of David's fortune, *the first of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet him, falling down before him, and deprecating punishment* (2 Sam. xix. 18, 19, 20.); is the very same character.

That vice, be it what it will, to which
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our particular temper directly leads us, is an enemy already advanced to the gates of the heart; and if it finds the heart like a city without walls, it enters at its pleasure, we can make no resistance. If we have no rule over our own spirit, if we do not carefully govern our natural temper, we cannot avoid indulging that vice. But the indulgence of any one vice, is inconsistent with true godliness of character; it forfeits our future happiness; it excludes us from the favour of God. *For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.* (James, ii. 10.) If, therefore, our becoming a prey to this one vice, were the only effect of our neglecting to govern our natural temper, it might be sufficient to deter us from the neglect.

But this is very far from being the whole effect of our neglecting to govern our natural temper: the man who ruleth not his spirit, does not merely become enslaved to one vice; in consequence of this, he is open to every vice, and certainly shall be led into very many vices. Every ruling sin will require from the man who lives in the indulgence of it, the commission of many others, for its support, for its gratification, or for disguising and concealing it: and if that sin has by its suitableness to an ungoverned natural temper, obtained dominion over us, it will not be in our power to abstain from any of these others, whenever they become necessary for these purposes. This might be illustrated and confirmed by a long detail; but it is not needful to produce many instances; it lies open to the observation of every man, in the daily course of the world. Few vices at their first approach smile so sweetly, or so much put on the look of innocence, as the love of pleasure: but let a man, by giving a loose to his natural temper, be once abandoned to the love of pleasure, and the vices are innumerable by which he must necessarily be contaminated; it quickly brings on a disrelish of every enjoyment and of every sentiment superior to the gratifications of sensuality and the suggestions of appetite; no office of kindness, no exertion in doing good must be expected from the sensualist; the labour of performing it would break in upon the indolence and destroy the gaiety of the present hour; his pleasure are ex-

penfive; in supporting them he dissipates all the wealth that is his own, he covets that of other men as the means of continuing his riots, he becomes the slave of avarice, he goes beyond the lowest miser in rapacity, extortion, rapine, and dishonest arts; gratitude to a benefactor, fidelity to a friend, the claims of innocence, the sacred rights of marriage, often stand between him and the indulgence on which his soul is set; they must all be overleaped, all the stratagems of seduction, all the methods of perfidy, must be practised; the tyrant of his heart demands it. This very tyrant got possession of David's heart for a little while, and it led him first meanly to attempt imposing a spurious offspring on his valiant, faithful, and zealous servant, and afterwards basely to lay a snare for his life, and expose him to certain destruction in bravely serving him; if it could produce deeds so foul in a short period of usurpation, what a series of crimes will it not produce when it is quietly settled on the throne for life? Vanity is, perhaps, in itself one of the most harmless of the vicious passions, it is reckoned the object rather of ridicule, than of indignation; but let it predominate in the temper, and be indulged without reserve, it will lead to vices well deserving of our most serious indignation; it will prompt a man to falsehood and lies in order to raise admiration of his abilities or his exploits; it will hurry him on to an expence of ostentation which his fortune cannot bear, to meanness and injustice for supporting it, and to every wile, however unlawful, for hiding the poverty which it has produced; it will make him betray a trust, sacrifice the rights of others, or venture on the basest actions, when by so doing he can display his importance to the great, or catch the applauses of the multitude; it will seduce him to deny the most momentous truths, to laugh at the most sacred obligations, to propagate the most pernicious maxims, that he may appear superior to the vulgar. Generosity is an amiable temper: but the man who has allowed the generosity of his nature to lead him into profusion, will soon become guilty of all the vices which seem necessary for retrieving his distressed circumstances, and will find his heart embittered against mankind, by the ingratitude of those on whom he injudiciously lavished his favours. When
such

such faults of temper as these can beget so many and so heinous vices, it is surely needless to trace out the innumerable progeny of those turns of temper which tend still more strongly to multiply crimes: every page, for instance, of the history of mankind is full of the enormities of all different kinds, which have sprung from the love of power degenerated into boundless ambition; and the experience of all ages has verified the apostle's assertion, that *the love of money is the root of all evil.* (1 Tim. vi. 10.)

But it deserves to be particularly remarked, that as soon as the misgovernment of natural temper has subjected a man to one predominant or ruling vice, he is no longer proof against even such vices as are in themselves most opposite to that very temper. To a person who is under the dominion of any one vice, mere temper is not a security against any crime. Every one's observation will supply him with instances of persons who, being engaged in one vicious course, have by it been led into sins most contrary to their nature, and at the thought of which they would have shuddered, if their darling sin had not demanded them, and produced insensibility to their baseness; with instances of the soft and gentle being brought to act with cruelty, and even to venture upon murder; of the benevolent and kind-hearted labouring to bring ruin upon those who happened to stand in the way of some unlawful project; of the generous, in the prosecution of some bad design, stooping to the most sordid actions; of the candid and open betrayed into schemes of artifice, dissimulation, and falsehood; of the timid rushing forward into the most dangerous crimes. Hence a reflection which is often made, and is so obvious as to occur to the least discerning, of a person who has become addicted to any vice, that it has changed his very nature.

Thus the man who abandons himself to that one vice which arises from the corruption of his natural temper, is from that moment in danger of every sin. Every predominant vice requires as great a number of other vices to be subservient to it in the course of a wicked life, as the ministers whom any tyrant can stand in need of, to be the instruments of his cruelty, rapacity, and lusts. In consequence of indulging that vice which suits

his particular temper, the sinner becomes polluted with many acts of almost all sins, and depraved by confirmed habits of very many sins. By being like a city without walls, destitute of defence against any sin, he becomes *like a city broken down*, reduced to ruins, desolated, uninhabited, and uninhabitable; and, as the prophet foretold of ancient Babylon, *wild beasts of the desert lie there, and their houses are full of doleful creatures, and owls dwell there, and satyrs dance there, and the wild beasts of the islands cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces* (Isai. xiii. 21, 22.): every thing regular, fair, and worthy is destroyed out of his heart, he is filled with all iniquity.

After the detail which has been given of the consequences of our neglecting to govern our natural temper, can it be necessary to use many words for dissuading us from the neglect? Can any of you think of pleading your temper as an excuse for any vice? Do you not see that because your temper leans to that particular vice, you ought for that very reason to guard against it with the greater anxiety and care? On that side your danger is most imminent, and therefore to that side your quickest and your most constant vigilance should be directed. Can you imagine that God requires you not to employ all the care that is necessary for governing your natural temper? To imagine it, were to suppose that he gives every man allowance to live in the practice of some one sin; for every peculiarity of temper indulged without control, it has been clearly shewn, terminates, naturally and inevitably, in a correspondent vice. Nay, to imagine it, were to suppose that God has granted unlimited permission to commit all sins in some particular situations: for there is no sin, which the predominant vice springing from the indulgence of a man's natural temper, may not at times demand. Such imaginations are absurd and impious; and therefore it must be true, that God requires each of us to rule his own spirit, to restrain and regulate the prevailing bias of his nature. The work is difficult, very difficult: but since it is a necessary and important work, its difficulty ought only to augment our care and diligence in performing it. Its difficulty will be no excuse for our neglecting it;

it only renders it a very substantial part of our probation and moral discipline. In spite of our greatest care and our most assiduous application, the natural temper will, I fear, start forth now and then into vice; the merciful God, who *knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust* (Psal. ciii. 14.), will doubtless reckon this among the infirmities of our nature, to which he extends his paternal pity; but it will be only with respect to those who sincerely exert themselves in opposing and subduing it: those who bestow no pains upon it, he will hold to be without excuse, and to them he will impute all the corruption and all the crimes which arise from the misgovernment of their temper. In this, as in every other case, God's mercy is great to the failings of the upright, but he sheweth no mercy to any wicked transgressors. Can you think without horror, of the baseness of those multiplied vices with which the habitual misgovernment of your natural temper must in time overspread your souls? Can you think without terror of the accumulated guilt of all these vices, and of the punishment to which they must expose you? Possessed and actuated by these emotions, be roused to every exertion for removing the faulty propensity of your nature. It is like a subtle poison pervading all the powers of your souls, mixing itself with all your sentiments and actions, and infecting them; it envenoms the foundation, and vitiates all the issues of life. While you neglect to govern your natural temper, all your endeavours to avoid or to mortify the vices which spring from it, will be but like lopping off a few twigs, which the vigour of the root will enable quickly to grow again, perhaps stronger and more luxuriant than before: it is only by setting yourselves at once to govern it, to rectify all its perversities, that you can *lay the axe to the root of the tree*, and effectually kill all the branches. Thus shall we in the easiest and most effectual manner, by the grace of God, render our hearts pure, our conduct blameless, consistent, and uniform, and ourselves acceptable to him, and fit for the future state of perfection and happiness. How we ought to govern our temper, so as to answer this important purpose, shall be explained in the next discourse.

S E R M O N V.

The Manner of governing the Natural Temper.

PROV. xxv. 28.

He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down and without walls.

THAT men's natural tempers are by a multitude of causes rendered infinitely various; and that every man's governing his own temper is absolutely necessary in order to prevent his being by it precipitated, not only into the vices which suit it most, but also, by means of them, into almost every vice, and consequently is his indispensable duty, has been already shewn, in two discourses. It remains on this subject, and shall be the business of this discourse, to shew, how this duty ought to be performed; to explain, what is implied in the government of the natural temper, or in a man's having *rule over his own spirit*.

It implies not, that a man destroy his peculiar temper. It is the business of government, not to exterminate the subjects, but to direct, to animate, and to restrain them properly. To extirpate one's natural temper, is impossible. It is a distinguishing character, impressed on every soul by the hand of the Almighty, which the power of man can no more erase, than it can efface the distinctive characters of the several kinds of plants and animals, and reduce them all to one kind.

If it were possible for a man to destroy his peculiar temper, it would not be necessary, it would be even pernicious. It is for the best purposes, that the all-wise God hath distributed among mankind so great a diversity of tempers: could we destroy that diversity, all these purposes would be defeated. The beautiful variety which at present prevails among the human species, would disappear; an insipid sameness of character would succeed. Men would no longer be disposed to different pursuits and manners of acting, nor fitted for uniting closely in society: all would act in the same manner, each would be fit only for solitude or for independence; all the delights and all the benefits of social connection and social commerce would be at an end.

Among all the varieties of temper which men possess, there is not one inconsistent

consistent with virtue, there is not one which duty requires us to endeavour to extirpate. We are apt to consider some turns of natural temper as in themselves virtuous or vicious. The reason is, that the affections from whose predominance some tempers result, are naturally friendly to virtue, and lead to it when they are cherished; and those in the predominance of which other tempers consist, tend most directly to vice, and lead to it whenever they are indulged. The former tempers, such for instance as hold of the benevolent affections, are in themselves desirable and amiable; the latter, such for example as proceed from anger, or from any of the selfish principles, are disagreeable, render the practice of some virtues difficult, and put men in great danger of becoming vicious. Our proneness to run into the mistake is the greater, because the names given to tempers of the one kind often imply their improvement into virtue, and the names given to those of the other kind express that turpitude which belongs to them only when they have degenerated into vice. But as the former, considered only as natural biases, have no real virtue, so the latter, considered in the same light, are not really vicious. It is an unhappiness to be marked with them, but it is not sinful in itself. They are very liable to abuse; and the abuse of them is sinful: but the best natural temper may likewise be abused; and the abuse of it too is sinful.

But though it be neither possible nor necessary to *extirpate* the natural temper, it is both possible and necessary to *govern* it. We every day meet with persons who, from good breeding; or from prudence, can disguise their temper and keep it from shewing itself, not on one occasion, but on many occasions and through a long course of time; could not, then, better principles enable them to correct it? We actually see some persons who have corrected very bad natural tempers, to a great degree: their closest and most intimate friends perceive little starts of them on particular emergencies; but the general tenor of their behaviour retains no vestige of their constitutional fault of temper; most of their acquaintance can scarcely believe that ever they were subject to it. A physiognomist pretended to discover by his art, that the great Athenian philosopher, Socrates, was ad-

dicted to vices so opposite to his whole conduct and character, that all who knew him were disposed to ridicule the pretensions of the physiognomist as absurd: but, to their astonishment, Socrates declared, that he was, by his constitutional bias, prone to all the vices which had been imputed to him, and that it was only by philosophy that he had got the better of them. Would it not be shameful, if many Christians could not make a similar declaration? By the power of Christian principles, the government of the natural temper may certainly be carried to a great height of perfection. Let us consider what it implies, and carefully set ourselves to practise it. The government of our peculiar temper may be comprehended in three particulars,—that we restrain it from breaking out into sin,—that we render it subservient to the practice of virtue,—and that we incorporate it with all our virtues.

1. The first object of a man's care, in *ruling his own spirit*, is to restrain his natural bias, so that it may not become vicious, or lead him into sin. The least that can be incumbent on us, is to keep it within such bounds that it may continue innocent: but even this will be very difficult. The natural temper may be compared to a constitutional proneness to any bodily distemper, which it is possible to prevent from actually breaking out into that distemper, or at least from breaking out into other than short and moderate fits of it, consistent with an habitual state of health: but this can be obtained only by constant attention to the constitution, by unintermitted care to observe a regimen fit to counteract it; if it be in the least degree neglected, the distemper will break out with violence, and become mortal. In like manner, to prevent our natural temper from bringing us under the dominion of those sins which are suitable to it, will require the most intense and unwearied diligence in opposing every irregular tendency, and restraining every blameable exertion of that temper, in avoiding every action which can confirm it, and every object and opinion which can increase its faulty bias, and in pursuing such a conduct, cherishing such opinions, and dwelling upon such objects, as are fit to wear off that bias. Diligence in all this, is necessary for our avoiding every vice, but it is peculiarly necessary

for our avoiding that ruling vice to which our constitution makes us to lean most strongly.

Every passion and affection is weak and pliable in the moment of its birth. Had we always recollection enough to observe, and resolution enough to check its first tendency to irregularity, our victory over it would be easy. But if we let slip this favourable moment, it will soon be able to carry us wherever it pleases. *When thou fittest to eat*, says Solomon, *put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite* (Prov. xxii. 1, 2.). By the careful observation of this rule, by opposing the first rising of the sensual appetite, the man who is most strongly turned to pleasure, would become capable of abstaining from every excess, and from every forbidden species of enjoyment. If we could mark the instant in which the desire of riches or of honours begins to render us uneasy in the want of them, and to suggest improper methods of pursuing them; the instant in which pride begins to swell the heart, malevolence to imbitter the spirit, sociability to throw off the restraints of virtue, desire to grow up into rapacity or careflessness, and hope into presumption, *laughter to become mad* (Ecclef. ii. 2.), sorrow to degenerate into dejection, or fear into despondence; the instant in which reserve verges towards fullness, in which modesty makes us think of omitting what our soul approves, in which we feel an inclination to resist evidence by which we are convinced, or to strive to believe what we cannot perceive to be proved, or to persist in a course which we see good reason to alter: if we could seize and improve that instant, we should effectually prevent our natural turn of temper from betraying us into sin. Even they who are far from governing it as they ought, may be convinced of this from their own experience: the most hasty spirits, for example, may perhaps recollect some rare occasions on which they have watched the beginnings of their anger, prevented its boiling in their hearts, and recovered their composure as soon as it was disturbed; the same care constantly employed, would enable them to conquer it, and preserve them from all the outrages into which it has hurried them at other times. Constantly to observe and correct the first tendency of the predominant passion to evil, would be to

kill the seeds of all its congenial vices, it would be to *pluck out the right eye*, and to *cut off the right hand* (Mat. v. 29, 30.).

When this is neglected, when the ruling passion is allowed to become in any degree irregular, it works within the soul, it fixes the imagination on the attractions of its object, and from the contemplation of it draws nourishment and acquires strength. Then it struggles for exertion. To prevent its exertion will require more resolute and vigorous efforts than would have been sufficient to check it before it was so far indulged. But their difficulty is not greater than the necessity of employing them is urgent. If selfishness has already prompted thee to devise an unrighteous plan for gratifying it, and to wish for an opportunity of executing it; if *thine heart* has already *declined to the ways of a strange woman* (Prov. vii. 25.), and thou hast *lusted after her beauty in thine heart* (Chap. vi. 25.); if wrath has already raged like a tempest in thy breast, and torn thee with the desire of hurting the person who had provoked it; if the gaiety of thy heart has already risen into levity ready to overleap the bounds of decency or to sport with sacred things; if thy prevailing passion, whatever it be, has already met with inward indulgence, recollect thyself immediately, thou hast no time to lose, thou art on the brink of the precipice, in one moment thou must either retreat, or tumble down. Even after the prevailing passion has been heedlessly suffered to operate so far, it may sometimes be checked and subdued by a bold and resolute effort seasonably exerted.

If we can even rein in our ruling passion before it has broken out into overt acts of vice, it will be of great importance for our obtaining the command of it. Every outward action strengthens the inward principle from which it proceeds; if we indulge ourselves in vicious actions dictated by our ruling passion, each of them will give it new vigour, and, aided by our natural proclivity to it, they will quickly render it habitually vicious, and almost irresistible. Is thy heart prone to pride? High looks, lofty eyes, haughty words, stately carriage, insulting actions, will render thee continually more prone to it. Is thy natural propensity to anger? Hasty words, bitter taunts, outrageous violence, will increase the propensity. But abstinence from all such evil actions as

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fall in with your natural temper, will be the beginning of your victory over it; deprived of the nourishment which it would have drawn from them, it will gradually be weakened; your abstinence will become continually easier; and by persisting in it, your temper will lose all its tendency to vice.

Our several passions and affections are excited by the presence, or by the lively conception of, their objects; they are inflamed by our entertaining flattering opinions of their objects. The frequent presence of these objects, the dwelling upon these opinions, cannot fail to strengthen our several passions, and, wherever the strength of a passion is faulty, to render it irregular and vicious. The greater our propensity to any passion, the more quickly will it become irregular. If therefore we would restrain our predominant passion, we must be at the greatest pains to avoid the objects, the opinions, the imaginations, which are favourable to its growth. Hast thou a propensity to excess? *Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour to the cup, when it moveth itself aright* (Prov. xxiii. 31.). Is thy constitutional bias to impurity and lust? *Look not on a woman till thou hast lusted after her* (Mat. v. 28.). Dost thou feel in thyself any tendency to a narrow and contracted spirit? Let not thy heart suggest to thee that wealth is precious, let not thy fancy magnify the advantages of riches: *Wilt thou set thine eyes on that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings, they flee away as an eagle towards heaven* (Prov. xxiii. 5.). Wouldst thou restrain thy ruling passion? Learn first to govern thy senses and thine imagination.

In order to restrain our ruling passion, it will often be necessary, studiously to turn our attention to such objects, and to accustom ourselves to such actions, as are most contradictory to it. Art thou constitutionally gloomy? Turn thy thoughts to the smiling scenes of nature, the cheering views of providence, and the gladdening prospects of religion. Art thou too much inclined to gaiety and giddiness? Force thyself to frequent contemplation of every thing that is awful in religion, and to the frequent performance of serious exercises. Art thou apt to become too fond of pleasure? Deny thyself even such gratifications as are lawful. Art thou naturally indolent? Prescribe to

thyself vigorous and continued exertion in some laudable employment. When a twig has long been bent one way, it cannot be made straight, without being for some time bent the contrary way.

The vices to which the natural temper gives us a propensity, are those which we shall find the greatest difficulty in conquering; and which, after many defeats, will most frequently revolt. The last vices which a good man is able to subdue, are his constitutional vices; he cannot mortify them perfectly in this mortal state: after all his pains, they now and then prevail against him; they are his frailties, from the incursions of which he can never be altogether secure. When Peter was a young Christian, he betrayed the timidity of his temper by denying his Lord: after he had made great proficiency in the Christian life, *he withdrew from the gentile converts, and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision* (Gal. ii. 12.). He had often, in the interval, displayed a noble courage; but the contrary disposition had a foundation in his temper, and was ready to break out on particular occasions. Good men fall into other sins, only before a violent temptation, or by being very much off their guard: but the best men, by the least failure in circumspection, or on a very weak temptation, sometimes fall into particular acts of those sins which suit their natural temper; the temptation to them is ever present, it lurks within, it is in the heart itself. We should not for this reason give indulgence to such sins, or suffer ourselves to think favourably of them: whenever we fall into them, we should repent deeply: that we may not have occasion often to repent of them, we should direct our strictest attention to them, and employ our most strenuous endeavours against them, and thus, if human infirmity permits not our avoiding them wholly, render our commission of them less frequent every day. A propensity to them is the weak part of the fortress; it needs a double guard. To preserve us from these vices, is one of the chief purposes for which the grace of God is given; a victory over them, is one of the greatest triumphs of divine grace in the heart of man: grace to conquer them should be one of the greatest subjects of our prayers; and we should improve the grace of God to this purpose, with the utmost diligence.

gence. The generality neglect to govern their natural temper, even so far as to restrain it from becoming vicious, or productive of vicious actions: but the government of the temper, the ruling of a man's *own spirit*, implies much more than this.

2. It implies, that every man render his temper subservient to the practice of virtue and holiness. As every natural temper, even the most amiable, may degenerate into vice, so, on the contrary, every temper, even that which becomes most disagreeable by the smallest corruption of it, may be made to contribute to the virtue of the heart. To make our natural temper to contribute to this, is an important part of our duty in governing it: it is the business of government, not only to restrain the subjects from crimes, but also to encourage them in right practice, and to direct and regulate their several occupations.

Every natural temper properly managed and improved, may give us an advantage, either for the practice of some particular virtue, or for the general security of our virtue.—Some turns of temper are naturally and strongly allied to virtue. It is scarcely necessary to observe, because it is so plain, that all the tempers which are founded in a predominance of the kind affections, are directly favourable to the love of mankind, to all the important virtues of benevolence and charity, and render the practice of every social duty easy and pleasant; or that they introduce a habit of soul congruous to the love of God, as well as to that inward serenity which characterizes every grace, and renders it doubly amiable.

Other turns of temper are, as it were, neutral between virtue and vice: in perceiving how these may be rendered serviceable to virtue, there is little difficulty. The keen and eager temper, in which desire is the chief ingredient, when directed to holiness as its object, will render a man spirited in the practice of it, and susceptible of a strong impulse from its joys and rewards. The contrary temper, in which aversion prevails, tends to cherish a deep abhorrence of sin, which is one of the strongest and most permanent securities against the indulgence of it. Both these tempers may become equally conducive to holiness, by prompting us, the one to avoid evil, the other to do good.

The temper of confidence which hope produces, will encourage the heart to aspire after the most excellent attainments, and to attempt the most arduous improvements in virtue. It seems to have been eminently the temper of the apostle Paul; in the school of Gamaliel, it led him to *profit in the Jews religion above many his equals in his own nation* (Gal. i. 14.); in the Christian church, it made him to strive that he might not be *a whit behind the very chiefest apostles*, but *in labours more abundant* (2 Cor. xi. 5. 23.); his discourse to the elders of Ephesus (Acts, xx. 18—35.) bears many strong marks of it; in all his writings and in all his actions we may read his ambition to *reach forth unto those things which are before* (Phil. iii. 13.). The opposite temper, likewise, of caution and timidity has so many peculiar advantages, is so friendly to circumspection and watchfulness, and consequently to that holiness which, without these, cannot be steadily and blamelessly practised in this state of trial and difficulty, that the wise man says, *Happy is the man that feareth alway* (Prov. xxviii. 14.). When a cheerful heart is united to a virtuous character, it favours the improvement of it, it is its ornament, it gives a grace to all its exertions, it renders it amiable and attractive. Neither is the contrary temper without its own advantages; when it is duly regulated, it produces a seriousness in religion, which is venerable and commanding, and proves a preservative against many sins. A high tone of the passions, a sensibility, ardour, or activity of spirit, prepares the soul for entering into the raptures of devotion, for feeling the fervours of godly zeal, for shewing eminent alacrity in every duty. This temper led John to sin, on one occasion, by wishing for fire from heaven to consume the Samaritans (Luke, ix. 54.), and on another occasion, by intriguing for one of the chief places in the kingdom of Christ (Mat. xx. 21. Mark, x. 37): but it likewise cherished that holy vehemence in religion, which entitled him to be surnamed, *A son of thunder* (Mark, iii. 17.); and it gave his benevolence that constant warmth, that benign ardour which is conspicuous in all his writings. A temper opposite to this, may be improved into a settled composure and calm equability in the love and practice of holiness. A resolute spirit will render

render it the easier to be steadfast in our adherence to goodness. A pliable and variable temper is, to a certain degree, requisite for our being ready to correct what we have done amiss. But it is unnecessary to enter further into particulars on this head.

It is more needful to observe, because it is not so obvious, that even those turns of temper which are most nearly allied to vice, and which are with the greatest difficulty kept from running into it, may, notwithstanding, be rendered subservient to virtue. Pride, for instance, may be improved into true dignity of character, into a noble and habitual disdain of every thought and action that is mean or base. An ambitious temper needs only to be fixed upon its properest objects, in order to animate us in the indefatigable pursuit of that genuine honour which results from the approbation of God and from the glories of heaven, and which will be bestowed only on the righteous, and in proportion to their righteousness. A temper which, by being neglected, would become blameably selfish and contracted, will, by being governed, become eminently conducive to prudence, and an incitement to diligence in that course of holiness which is our real wisdom and our best interest. Even that temper in which the malevolent affections tend to preponderate, the sour, the morose, the irascible, may be rendered subservient to our virtue and improvement: if it be curbed so strongly as not to lead us to hurt others, or to wish for their hurt, it will exert itself in a keen indignation against vice, in a rigorous purity of heart, in a blameless severity of manners; and it will make us inaccessible to many temptations which have great power over soft, and gentle, and social minds.

Thus every temper may be rendered productive of some advantages for the practice of virtue; and it is our duty to consider what are the advantages which our particular temper gives us, and to improve them with care.

3. We ought not only to render our peculiar temper subservient to virtue, but also to incorporate it with all our virtues.

Whether a man's character be good or bad, his natural temper will run through it, if it be not violently hindered, and will tinge it with a correspondent complexion. Both the particular vices to

which different sinners addict themselves, and the particular manners in which they practise the same vices, are in a great measure determined by their different tempers. The grace of God does not extinguish the diversity of tempers; it only purifies and rectifies each of them. There is a great variety in the make of human bodies, even such as have nothing faulty or disproportioned; one is formed for strength, another for agility; the beauty of one consists in dignity, that of another in elegance: there are still greater varieties in men's inward characters, even when all of them are virtuous. In dispositions and manners nowise blameable, there may be great dissimilitude. Characters equally good are yet never the very same. No virtue is wholly wanting in any good character: but one virtue or another predominates according to the original propensity of the soul, and directs and shapes the exertion of all the rest: and according to the same propensity, any one virtue is exercised and practised in a different manner and style by different men. Survey the good characters with which you are acquainted; you will find them distinguished in both these respects; no two of them are perfectly alike. All the good men whose lives the scripture has recorded, display different forms of holiness derived from their dissimilar tempers. Job is characterized by patience; Moses by meekness; David is high-spirited, his devotion is fervent, his virtues are all heroic; Solomon has a softer soul, turned for exercising virtue in the mild arts of peace; John and Paul are both warm, fervent, and affectionate, but the warmth of the former is sweet and gentle, that of the latter bold and enterprising. To the influence of the natural temper informing and fashioning the whole character and conduct, are owing all the varieties of characters truly virtuous: without that influence they could differ only in the *degree* of their goodness; in all other respects they would be precisely similar.

As every man thus derives from nature a distinct personal character, he ought to adhere to it, and to preserve its peculiar decorum. He can preserve it only by maintaining his own natural temper so far as it is innocent, and acting always in conformity to it. We ought to comply with and follow our own particular and proper nature in the cast of our whole

behaviour; to violate it, will always be of bad consequence. Equability, confidence, and uniformity in the whole tenor of our lives, is of very great importance; but it cannot be obtained, if we endeavour to put on the nature of another man, and to throw off our own. In whatever instances we attempt it, our behaviour cannot be natural or graceful; that will always become every man's most, which is most his own. Every departure from a man's own personal character is an affectation which will be either ridiculous or disgusting. It is like the painting of the face, it disguises the genuine complexion of the soul. It is like altering the natural cast of the body, by running into distorted attitudes and motions. It is as if, in ancient games, the brawny wrestler had engaged only in the course, and the man who was fitted for the race, had endeavoured to signalize himself by feats of strength. A man naturally sedate and grave, attempting gaiety and frolic, becomes an awkward buffoon; and a man naturally cheerful, putting on gravity and severity, becomes no less awkwardly morose; each of them considered at one time, forms a perfect contrast to himself, as he appears at another time. The man of a mild, gentle, timorous, flexible spirit, by choosing a walk in life which suits him, will be truly amiable; but should he set up for a bold reformer, or intrude into a bustling sphere, or rush forward into dangerous enterprises, he would quickly lose himself, and betray his weakness. In a word, as every violation of a man's peculiar temper is, in its own way, disagreeable, ungraceful, and pernicious, it is an important part of the government of the temper, to perform all our duties, and to cultivate and exercise all our virtues, in congruity to it, and thus to maintain the decency of our personal and distinctive character.

To conclude this subject; if we would rule our own spirit; if we would govern our natural temper, let us restrain it from degenerating into vice, or leading us into sin: let us take every advantage which it can give us for the improvement of our hearts, and the practice of our duty; by preserving it, and adhering to it, so far as it is not vicious, let us render our whole character natural and uniform, and all our conduct graceful and consistent. The means of governing our peculiar temper

are the same with the means of performing every other duty, resolution, congruous exercises, watchfulness, and prayer. But all these means we must in this case employ with peculiar care and diligence, because it is a matter of peculiar difficulty to control and regulate our predominant disposition. Its importance is, however, in proportion to its difficulty. If we can effectually accomplish this, it will render it the easier to subdue all our other irregular passions. They act in subordination to it, and derive a great part of their strength from it; and to subdue it, is like cutting off the general, who was the spirit of the battle, and on whose fall the army breaks, and takes to flight. By cherishing our natural temper, when refined from all perversity, we shall facilitate the practice of virtue; we shall render our virtues truly our own, consistent, becoming, and graceful; we shall obtain that inward tranquillity, satisfaction, and self-enjoyment, which attends a natural state and behaviour; and when we are removed from this world, we shall find in our *father's house mansions* (John, xiv. 2.) peculiarly adapted to our character, and shall be fit to fill our proper place in the heavenly society, to the beauty, perfection, harmony, and happiness of which a variety of characters, stations, and employments, doubtless will contribute.

S E R M O N VI.

Virtuous Solitude.

PSALM cxix. 5.

O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!

A SOLICITUDE to perform our duty, an anxious concern to practise holiness at all times, and to make a constant progress in it, is an essential ingredient in a virtuous temper, a necessary qualification of our obedience, and a powerful means of our becoming active and steadfast in it. This solicitude is expressed strongly, though in very few words, in the text. The nature of the psalm gives great advantage for a lively and forcible expression of it. It is a pious meditation of David, in which he gives utterance to the several workings of his heart in a variety of situations, and particularly to his sentiments and emotions respecting the law

law of God. In comparison with the glowing pictures of character and manners, to which such a meditation gives scope, general maxims delivered in a speculative discourse, are cold and unaffecting. It introduces us at once into the recesses of the psalmist's heart; it displays all the movements of his soul; it enables us to perceive, and makes us to feel, how he thought and acted on every occasion. By this means it, as it were, embodies a virtuous temper; and while it gives us the clearest conception of the nature of holiness, at the same time strikingly inculcates the love and practice of it. Nothing could, for instance, convey to us a distincter or a livelier sense of earnest solicitude to practise and improve in holiness, than the warm wish which David expresses in my text, *O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!* This short exclamation discovers his inmost temper; it shows a soul burning with love to goodness, bent on the practice of it, panting after improvement in it, and rising in fervent prayer to God for his assistance; and it expresses this temper with so great a force, that we can scarcely read his wish, without feeling our hearts disposed to join in it. I propose to illustrate this temper, by pointing out the several particulars which are implied in it.

1. The psalmist's temper implies a lively sense of the supreme importance of holiness. A sense of this is the only proper foundation of solicitude to practise holiness; and it is plainly expressed in the context. In it the psalmist asserts the happiness of virtue; *blessed are the undeviated in the way, who walk in the way of the Lord: blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.* (Psal. ver. 1, 2.) He reflects that it is required by that God who has supreme authority over us; *thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently* (Ver. 4.). These views of holiness impressed him with such a sense of its importance, as naturally dictated this earnest wish, that his ways were directed to keep God's statutes. And when he had formed this wish, he hugged it in his very heart; he exulted in the prospect of the inward peace, self-complacence, and joy, which the accomplishment of it would give him; and, by this prospect, he cherished his wish and increased its ardour;

Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments: I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments. (Ver. 6, 7.)

In whatever light we consider holiness, we may well be sensible of its importance. When we consider it merely in relation to the sentiments of our own hearts, it is of such unspeakable consequence, that, if we be destitute of it, if we be conscious of our having lived in the violation of its laws, we cannot approve ourselves, but must be ashamed and despise ourselves, in every moment of serious reflection. Holiness is of indispensable obligation; for it is the law of the God who made us, the Sovereign of heaven and earth. It is the health of the soul, the balm of adversity, the ornament of prosperity, the greatest good of man, the happiness both of the present life and of the future. The wise man estimates matters justly, when he declares, that to fear God, and keep his commandments, is the whole duty of man. (Eccl. xii. 13.)

But many of us seem to form a very different judgment. If we ever think of the importance of keeping God's law, we think of it very seldom and very slightly; the thought sinks not so deep as to touch the heart; it certainly continues not so long, nor recurs so often, as to make a lasting impression on the heart. Far from regarding holiness as our chief, and, in comparison, our only concern, we seem to think it less our concern than any thing besides. A moment of guilty pleasure, a few pence, the gratification of any appetite or passion, seems to be, in our opinion, of greater moment than doing the will of God; for it is preferred to it every day. No wonder then that we are so indifferent, whether we do right or wrong, whether we improve or corrupt ourselves. Without a deep and permanent sense of the importance of virtue, as our dignity, our duty, and our interest, we cannot be solicitous to cultivate and practise it.

2. The temper which the psalmist expresses in the text, implies a settled love of goodness, and hatred of iniquity. This is the natural consequence of the former part of this temper. A just sense of the importance of holiness cannot fail to attach our hearts to it; and it will not suffer us to be cold or lukewarm
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in our attachment. *Thy word, says our psalmist, is very pure, therefore thy servant loveth it. I hate vain thoughts, but thy law do I love. My soul hath kept thy testimonies, and I love them exceedingly* (Ver. 140. 113. 163. 167.).

The worst of men cannot help approving virtue and disapproving vice: but the approbation and disapprobation of the wicked are only cool perceptions of the understanding. In the good man, these perceptions are improved into warm sentiments of the heart; are made to grow up into lively affections of love and hatred. A strong conception of the beauty of holiness, of the excellent nature and the happy consequences of virtue, enamours his soul, and makes him to feel all that David felt, when he said, *O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth. Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. Therefore I love thy commandments above gold, yea, above fine gold. Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way* (Ver. 97. 103. 104. 127. 128.). Hatred of sin is inseparable from the love of holiness; it is its counterpart; it is a different exertion of the very same affection. The more warmly we are affected by the excellence of virtue, the stronger sense we must have of the baseness of vice; the greater must be our abhorrence of it; the keener our indignation against it. A strong affection to any object always implies aversion to its contrary. If virtue be the darling of the heart, vice must be its detestation.

These principles, rooted and cherished in the soul, will necessarily promote virtuous solicitude. Actuated by them, we cannot but regret deeply every failure in our duty, every stain and depravity of our temper; we must long for deliverance from every remain of the body of sin; we must be intent upon holiness, and fired with a noble ardour in the practice of it.

3. This leads us on to observe, that the temper expressed in the text, includes a vigorous, constant, and prevailing desire to keep God's statutes. This is indeed the leading feature in that temper, it is the most obvious language of David's wish. It will naturally spring from a sense of the importance of holiness, and from love to it, on account of its importance; and it is only when it springs from these

that it can have either vigour or stability. When a wish that we were holy, springs up suddenly, as is too often the case, only from an occasional fit of seriousness, from accidental experience of some of the inconveniencies of our vices; from the present depression of adversity; or from a momentary dread of the wrath of God, as from a seed dropt by chance in an improper or unprepared soil; no wonder that it is weak and puny, and quickly withers; for it has no sound and healthy root. It must grow out of a warm love to goodness, else it cannot thrive. That it may thrive, and yield its proper fruits, it must be both strong and constant.

Rare and transient wishes for holiness, however ardent, will be of small avail. There are few of us, perhaps, who do not sometimes wish, and wish earnestly too, that we were better than we are. It is only the sinner who is abandoned in his way, that never forms this wish. It now and then starts up in the thoughtless sons of pleasure, in the midst of their dissipation; though it stays not long enough to preserve them from going again into the house of a strange woman (Prov. vii. 5. 8.), or from seeking for mixt wine (Chap. xxii. 30.), on the next occasion. It sometimes steals into the heart of the busy worldling, though the cares of life banish it before it can excite him to labour strenuously for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life (John, vi. 27.). Sinners of every class cannot help sometimes wishing, their own souls know it, for deliverance from the power of sin. Nay, all who have not proceeded far and persisted long in sin, are at times wrung with anguish, and in the bitterness of their souls groan heavily for reformation. But all their wishes and their groans are useless, because they are not permanent and habitual.

On the other hand, our desires of virtue and improvement will not be sufficient, though they be constant, if they are not likewise strong. A man may feel pretty constantly a faint desire of doing good; but because it is faint, it is therefore ineffectual. We sometimes feel such a desire, even while we are committing sin. At the very time when opportunity invites, when temptation solicits, when appetite or passion prompts to an act of sin, we yet do not run into it with full complacency; there are desires and wishes on the other side; they struggle against the commission of the sin; but they

they are vanquished by the superior strength of sinful inclination; yet they do not yield in silence; they complain, as it were, of the violence which they suffer; they make us to feel great reluctance against the sin, even while they yield. When the act of sin is over, the virtuous desires revive; we are pierced with grief; we wish that we had not done it; we wish and pray that we may be more resolute hereafter. But corrupt inclination soon begins again to rise; it struggles against the nobler wish for virtue; these opposite desires possess the heart by turns; they sometimes even occupy it together, and distract it. But on a new trial, the vicious desire puts forth all its strength; the virtuous wish is overwhelmed; in every trial it fails; for it has not vigour enough to actuate us uniformly, in opposition to vicious principles.

David's concern to practise and improve in holiness, was at once vigorous and steady. He explicitly declares both its vehemence and its constancy—*Behold I have longed after thy precepts. My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times. I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments* (Ver. 40. 20. 131.). Our desires of virtue should have so great life, as to be able constantly to support themselves against all opposition, and to exert themselves in spite of every difficulty. *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness*: (Mat. v. 6.) the appetites of hunger and thirst will be satisfied with nothing but meat and drink; and they crave always till they get them; just so, our desire to keep God's law, ought to be such as will be satisfied with nothing less than actually keeping it, and such as will make our endeavours restless and indefatigable, till we be conscious that we have kept it.

4. The temper of solicitude to keep God's statutes, which David expresses in the text, implies a firm resolution to keep them. That he was resolved, he tells us explicitly, when he says almost immediately after, *I will keep thy statutes*. (Ver. 8.) *I have chosen the way of truth; I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart*. (Ver. 30. 69.) Throughout the psalm, he repeatedly declares his resolution, in a great variety of terms.

The desire of being virtuous, naturally

produces a resolution to practise virtue; and, by this resolution, the desire is, in its turn, confirmed.

We do not sincerely desire a thing, at most our desire of it is very weak, if we at the same time resolve not to do any thing for obtaining it. A strong desire of what in any measure depends upon our own endeavours, quickly converts itself into a resolution to pursue it; the desire is the resolution in its beginning; the resolution is the desire risen to maturity. When even transient wishes that they were better men, are accidentally excited in the wicked, they always produce, at least for a moment, some design of becoming better men. The design proves abortive, because the wishes were only transient. But were we earnestly and habitually desirous of becoming holy, we would be likewise sincerely and constantly determined to practise holiness. Without a resolution to do all we can to keep God's statutes, an ardent desire to keep them would be an absolute absurdity.

As soon as the resolution is formed, it supports and strengthens the desire. It presents the object of the desire in a new form fit to draw out that desire with redoubled force; it sets it before us as what we have resolved that we will by any means obtain. *I have said that I would keep thy words. I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments* (Ver. 57. 106.). The psalmist's prayer in the text, expresses a soul already resolved to practise virtue, and in consequence of this concerned and solicitous to execute the resolution. His resolution was hearty and permanent; and therefore his solicitude was vehement and lasting. But too often our resolutions are neither vigorous nor habitual; and our solicitude must partake in their infirmity and langour. When a favourable opportunity of committing some darling sin, occurs, when a strong temptation to it presents itself, we discover that we have never made a determined choice of the ways of virtue, that we have been but half resolved to walk in them, that resolution has never taken fast hold of us. For if our resolution be at all remembered in the hour of difficulty, we find it feeble and impotent; it suffers itself to be explained away; we persuade ourselves that it was not necessary to have formed

formed it with so great rigour and severity, and that in this instance we may venture to counteract it. Enervated by these suggestions of corrupt passion, our good resolutions yield; they vanish; and with them vanishes every desire to do our duty. This desire is again awakened; our resolutions are renewed; and renewed still again; but still again they fail, and are forgotten in the day of trial. Such fluctuation makes it plain, that our resolution was not firm. It sprang not from a stable love of goodness, nor from a predominant desire to practise it; and for that reason it begets no solicitude to carry it into execution. A hearty resolution would be an unalterable choice of God's testimonies as our employment and our *heritage for ever*. (Ver. 111.)

5. The psalmist's temper which we are describing, implies a prevailing bias of the whole soul towards virtuous practice. He declares explicitly that this was included in his temper; *I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end*. (Ver. 112.) It is not enough that the will be fixt in a determination to practise holiness; the whole heart likewise, all the affections and springs of action, must acquire a continual bent and tendency towards the practice of it. Till they have acquired this bent, our desire of practising holiness cannot settle into an uninterrupted solicitude, but must often fail of producing its effect. The inclination of the heart to virtue arises partly from the reduction of vicious passions, and partly from the vigour of good affections.

While vicious passions retain so great a strength as to render us often violently prone to sin, they will often likewise make us to look upon our duty with aversion or regret; they will extinguish for a time the desire of performing it, even though we be determined to perform it; and in the place of that desire, they will inspire wishes that we could in this instance dispense with obedience to the law of God. Few of us, I fear, have made so great a progress in virtue, as not sometimes to feel corrupt inclination struggling in this manner against our best principles and resolutions. We are, perhaps, determined not to indulge it: but it is so strong that it almost overcomes us; it is by a sort of force that principle and resolution restrain us, unwilling and reluctant, from proceeding to the full in-

dulgence of it. It is well if they restrain us by any means. God knows that in many cases they cannot. But their needing to restrain us by force, by so violent an exertion of their power, is a proof of the imperfection of our holiness. Our heart is not yet enough formed to virtue, else sinful passion could not resist so stoutly. Indeed, in this frail and feeble state, irregular appetites and passions cannot be totally extirpated; solicited by the presence or the conception of their object, they will sometimes rise and labour for indulgence. But in the person who is resolved and solicitous to adhere to virtue, and habitually actuated by this resolution and solicitude, irregular inclinations will be so often checked, and so much accustomed to submit, that whenever the virtuous principle begins to exert itself, they will, after a few languid efforts, yield without great reluctance; in like manner as the most mettlesome horse, by being inured to the bit, readily obeys the gentlest motion of the skilful rider.

At the same time, all virtuous affections, being nourished by the determined choice and love of the heart, and strengthened by habitual practice consequent thereupon, will be rendered sensible, as it were, of their title to indulgence, will rise with confidence, will be in a constant preparation and forwardness to exert themselves, and will exert themselves with alertness and vigour whenever they have opportunity. Thus ardent desire of virtue, cherished by love to it, and supported by a steady resolution to practise it, will gradually produce a propensity to virtue, wear off the contrary bias of depraved nature, and impress a predominant bent and tendency to run into the practice of every duty: and by this bent and tendency, the desire of virtue and improvement will be strengthened and secured of its accomplishment; for it will be rendered natural and congruous to the reigning temper of the soul.

6. Finally, the temper which the psalmist here expresses, implies fervent desire of God's assistance in the practice of holiness. He addresses his wish in a prayer to God; and in many passages of the psalm, with declarations of his solicitude to do his duty, he joins petitions for aid from God in doing it. *I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly. Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and I shall*

shall keep it unto the end. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments, for therein do I delight. Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness. Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness. Consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O Lord, according to thy loving-kindness. Let thine hand help me, for I have chosen thy precepts. (Ver. 8. 33. 35. 36. 40. 159. 173.)

The weakness and the corruption of our nature render the assistance of God absolutely necessary for our practising holiness. A sense of necessity is sufficient to produce ardent desires of that assistance, and earnest wishes for it, in every person who regards and is attached to holiness as his main concern. Had we indeed no hope of obtaining it, our wishes must be weak and transient: desire vanishes when we know it to be impossible that it should be fulfilled; it soon becomes languid when its accomplishment appears to be totally uncertain. But desire is supported and invigorated by the prospect of its being satisfied. Of assistance from the benignity of God, in practising that holiness which is his delight, nature itself infuses some degree of hope, and revelation gives us full assurances. If then we be not constantly concerned to obtain it, we cannot be sensible of the infinite importance of holiness, we can have no love to it, we can have neither desire nor resolution to adhere to it, we cannot have the smallest inclination of heart to the practice of it. This temper would impel us with an irresistible force to ask the aids of divine grace; it would not suffer us at any time to ask them without a real desire of them in our hearts; it would not suffer us to ask them with only weak desires. It would not suffer us to continue long without exerting desires of them; it would render our concern to be assisted and strengthened by God, constant and habitual. We stand in need of his assistance for doing every action of our lives in a right manner; let us not at the time of any action be void of the desire of his assistance. In particular, whenever we find either a temptation or an inclination to any sin, whenever we meet with any difficulty in perceiving or adhering to our duty, let us then recollect ourselves, and cherish and put forth desire of aid from Heaven. Let us diligently use all means of religious worship

and meditation, which God hath appointed for the communication of his grace to men; and whenever we use them, let it not be with indifference, let it be with fervent desire of obtaining by them the influences of divine grace. The grace of God alone can keep alive our solicitude to do his will, and preserve it in continual vigour; and, as the tree naturally draws in the sap which conduceth to its life and growth, that solicitude will foster earnest and habitual desires of his grace to enable us to do his will.

Thus, the psalmist's prayer in the text is a fervent expression of his solicitude to practise and improve in holiness. It displays a soul possessed with a deep sense of the supreme importance of holiness, with a prevailing love to it, with strong and constant desires of it, resolved firmly to adhere to it, habitually prone and well-disposed to its several duties, and earnest to obtain all that assistance from God, which is necessary for *holding up our goings in his ways.* (Psal. xvii. 5.) These are the sentiments and dispositions which, by their union, form that concern and solicitude to become holy, which ought to actuate us uniformly, which is an essential ingredient in a virtuous temper, and which will be one of the most powerful incitements to the cultivation of it. In every person who is not wholly destitute of holiness, some degree of this solicitude must take place. No man can practise holiness, whose heart is not set upon it as his business. The best of us are defective in virtuous solicitude; and therefore our holiness is so incomplete. A just and permanent concern to be better, would quickly carry us forward to the perfection of goodness.

That you may understand this holy solicitude still more clearly, that you may judge the more certainly whether you are actuated by it, that you may have the stronger sense of its moment and utility, I shall conclude this discourse with pointing out, what sort of conduct and behaviour will naturally result from the inward temper which we have described. Is it not plain, that the man whose soul is full of love to virtue, and resolved, anxious, and inclined to practise it and excel in it, as long as he acts under the influence of this temper, will be indefatigable in studying his duty, and careful, diligent, inflexible in doing what he knows to be his duty? Does not ardour in

in every art, prompt the artist to become perfect both in the knowledge of its principles, and in performing according to its rules? and can it be otherwise in the art of life?

In every situation, that man's concern, who glows with virtuous ardour, will be, not what is agreeable to his humour and inclination, and what will procure him pleasure or advantage, but solely what is right and good. Intent on discovering this, he will, like David, *meditate on God's precepts*, and *hide God's word in his heart*, that he may not sin against him; his *testimonies also* will be his *delight*, and his only *counsellors*. (Ver. 15. 11. 24.) Except we know our duty, it is impossible that we practise it. If we willingly remain ignorant of it, we are indifferent about it.

When desire, love, resolution, and inclination are all fixt upon holiness, the united force of these cannot fail to render a man diligent in practising it. He will abstain from every sin; for that holiness on which his heart is set, includes universal purity. We commit sin, only because we are not enough solicitous to avoid it. They who seek opportunities of sinning, who designedly meet temptations, or who yield without a struggle on their first assault, shew that they are wholly destitute of virtuous solicitude, nay under the power of a contrary temper, prone to sin, in love with it, confirmed in iniquity. Temptations will often force themselves upon us: if in this case we yield to them easily, or deliberate about yielding to them, or admit in our hearts any extenuations of the sin, or falter in our resistance to it, this manifestly proceeds from some coldness in our love of virtue, some weakness in our resolution to pursue it, some faintness in our desire of practising it, some remaining indisposition of our hearts to virtue. The man who is intent on virtue, will be watchful against every deviation from it. The infirmity of his nature will not allow him to avoid every act of sin: but his inward temper will make him restless till he recover himself by repentance, and fortify his soul more strongly against a relapse. A sudden temptation may now and then surprise him off his guard: but for the most part, the aversion of his determined heart against sin, will be roused quickly enough to defend him from a sudden assault. Corrupt appetite and

passion, like a reduced enemy deriving unnatural strength from a fit of despair, may at times exert such force as to gain an advantage over him; but they will never be able to bring him into lasting subjection; fixt on the attainment of holiness, he will war constantly against all its enemies, till he subdue them, though it should be by slow degrees, and by means of the severest struggles. He will practise and cultivate every virtue: for every virtue belongs to that holy temper which engages his most earnest solicitude. Omissions of his duty, neglects of the virtuous exertions for which he has opportunity, will be the rare blemishes of his conduct, not its general tenor or complexion. The temper of his soul will produce activity in well doing, will render him resolute, patient, and undaunted in surmounting all the difficulties of religion, will prompt him to put forth all his strength, that he may be ever pure, blameless, and eminently good. In proportion as our solicitude for virtue renders it our prevailing temper, every duty will become pleasant to us, by falling in with the predominant bent of our hearts; and we shall perform it with alacrity and cheerfulness: its very difficulties will only occasion an agreeable exertion of vigour: even the pains which it brings upon us, will be amply compensated by the gratification which the performance of it yields to our prevailing temper; and we shall constantly *delight ourselves in God's commandments, which we have loved*. (Ver. 47.)

O that our ways were directed thus to keep God's statutes! Amen.

S E R M O N VII.

The Power of Virtuous Resolutions.

PSALM CXIX. 106.

I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.

SOLEMN resolutions and vows have always been considered as powerful means of enabling men to abstain from vice and to practise virtue. Philosophers, as well as divines, have acknowledged their influence, and recommended it to their disciples, to form them with care. False religions, as well as the true religion, enjoin them, in order

order to determine their votaries to steadiness in those practices which they inculcate upon them.

In common life, experience shews that an explicit, determined resolution has often very great power. In religion, experience seems rather to proclaim that the best resolutions are generally weak and ineffectual: the one hour men resolve to practise holiness; and the next hour they forsake it, as if they had never intended to practise it. We cannot, however, fairly conclude from this inconstancy, that it is of no avail to form virtuous resolutions. In whatever degree the frailty of human nature and the temptations of the world may render them in fact abortive; it is evident from their natural tendency, that they are among the best means of reformation from sin, and of confirmation and improvement in holiness. The text will naturally lead us to unfold their tendency, and to evince their power. *I have sworn, says David, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.* He had already agreed to keep them; he had strengthened his resolution by interposing an oath, a solemn vow: he would not have formed it with so great a care and solemnity if he had not been convinced that it would not contribute much to regulate his conduct; and the manner of his reflecting upon it shows a deep sense of the obligation which it laid him under to fulfil. In this discourse, I shall examine the nature of that influence which virtuous resolutions have in fixing our temper and regulating our practice; and afterwards deduce some practical improvement from the subject.

What then is the nature of that influence and power which may justly be ascribed to virtuous resolutions? Mistake concerning it, is one of the principal causes of the inefficacy of such resolutions. We expect from them, effects which they cannot possibly produce; and therefore miss the fruits which might be reaped from the due improvement of them. A resolution, even the firmest and the strongest, cannot directly or immediately extirpate vice and implant holiness. It is an internal act of goodness; the repetition of it will form a correspondent habit; but the only habit correspondent to it, is the habit of resolving well. Virtuous resolutions, frequently renewed with sincerity, will accustom us to

renew them with less reluctance, with greater ease and readiness. But they cannot, by their immediate operation, without other means, cleanse the heart in an instant from vicious habits and sinful inclinations, or rear a virtuous temper. A resolution, however solemn, is only a determination of the will. But God has not put our dispositions and our habits so absolutely in our power, that we can form or destroy them by merely willing it. To become pure and virtuous is a far more arduous task. God has appointed it to be our exercise, our work, our labour throughout this state of trial. He has ordained that it should not be accomplished without constant exertion, diligence, and care. His grace could doubtless transform the soul, in a moment, from wickedness to perfect purity: but he has adapted the established methods of his grace to the principles of the human constitution; enabling even those to whom it is most liberally communicated, to mortify their depraved affections, and to acquire the virtues of the Christian temper, only by slow advances and imperceptible steps, in consequence of continual circumspection, unremitted activity in well-doing, and frequent and fervent prayer. As in the natural world, the plant is raised to maturity only by a regular process of vegetation, in consequence of skilful culture and the nourishing dews of heaven; so in the spiritual world, the seeds of virtue can be ripened into a solid temper only by a continued course of virtuous practice, animated by the power of divine grace. It is by exciting us to such practice, by prompting us to a series of good actions, that resolutions contribute to our improvement: and because they excite and prompt us in many ways, they are powerful instruments of our improvement.

1. A resolution of virtue lays us under an obligation to be virtuous. In the language of scripture, it *binds the soul with a bond*. (Num. xxx. 2.) A resolution to do any thing, though formed with perfect secrecy, produces an obligation to do it, without fulfilling which we cannot thoroughly approve ourselves. If we have rashly resolved to do what it is not fit to do, we are dissatisfied with our imprudence in resolving: if what we resolved upon was proper and worthy, to depart from it forces us to despise ourselves

selves for our fickleness and inconstancy; and pierces us with a mortifying consciousness, that our weakness renders us contemptible in the eyes of the world. If you know a person whose character in common life is, that he seldom understands his own mind, that he alters his intention almost every hour, that he never keeps one purpose so long as to have time to execute it, that he resolves and promises, but quickly changes sides; that he cannot be depended upon in any business of moment; you know likewise that it is far from an estimable character, that it is universally despicable, that it is incompatible with every degree of a manly spirit. To carry this wavering and unsteadiness into religion, is far more censurable. The importance of religion and the baseness of living in the violation of its laws, prevent the breach of religious resolution from being regarded as a contemptible imbecility; they render it a detestable crime. To *depart from evil, and do good* (Psal. xxxiv. 14.), is the proper business of man. To resolve upon it, is our highest wisdom; it is necessary to our present peace and to our future happiness. In proportion to its importance, is the baseness and the ignominy of inconstancy in pursuing this course after we have resolved upon it. Having decreed the only path of life, having determined to walk in it, can any levity be so degrading, can any irresolution be so disgraceful, as to be allured by trifling pleasures or advantages, or prevailed upon by momentary pains, to desert this path, and to persist in wandering from it, though we meet disquiet and disappointment at every step, and know that without a speedy return, the end must be everlasting death? *After vows of such high importance, of so interesting tendency, it is a snare, it is full of danger to make inquiry* (Prov. xx. 25.), once to admit the thought of retracting them. Can you know yourselves guilty of it, without confusion and self-abhorrence? Can you be guilty of it, and not feel yourselves justly abominable in the sight of God? *When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it, for he hath no pleasure in fools.* (Ecclef. v. 4.) By thus laying us under an obligation, the violation of which must produce a mortifying sense of baseness and demerit,

virtuous resolutions cannot fail to promote steady perseverance in virtue.

A virtuous resolution impels us to virtue, by rendering it an object and aim to us. Let a pursuit be nowise interesting in itself, yet when we have determined to engage in it, we are no longer indifferent: this very determination is sufficient to impress it upon us as an end which we must now attain. Religion is supremely interesting to every human creature, though he should never resolve to practise it. But giddiness or the avocations of worldly care hinder many from thinking of it as their concern, as a business with which they ought to charge themselves. Inattention to our concern in the practice of religion, is the most general cause of the neglect of it. Against that inattention, the most direct and efficacious antidote is a serious, deliberate, firm resolution that religion shall be the business of our lives. This sets it in our eye, as what must be practised, as what must not be on any account neglected, as the center in which all our thoughts, and views, and exertions must ultimately terminate: this gives the whole soul a prevailing and habitual bias to it, and predisposes us to resist every temptation to vice, and to embrace every opportunity for virtue. Of these native consequences of a fixt determination, David gives many bright delineations from his own experience. *I have sworn that I will keep thy righteous judgments: therefore I will perform it: my soul is continually in my hand, yet do I not forget thy law: the wicked have laid a snare for me, yet I erred not from thy precepts: thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end* (Psal. cxix. 109, 110, 111, 112.). *I have chosen the way of truth: What was the effect? Thy judgments have I laid before me, as the model of my whole conduct; I have stuck unto thy testimonies; I will run the way of thy commandments* (Ver. 30, 31, 32.). Such are the genuine sentiments and workings of a soul under the power of a strong purpose of universal holiness. It is natural for those who have never resolved on virtuous practice, to waver between good and evil. But a firm resolution fixes the will in the choice of good; and as long as it is thus fixt, how can

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our actions, which are the immediate effects of the exertion of the will, be evil? Till the resolution is decayed or forgotten, we cannot give full consent to any vice: it will be not only a constant monitor of our obligation to adhere stedfastly to virtue, but likewise a constant incitement to fulfil the obligation, and a counterpoise to the power of sin. Temptations solicit in the same manner as formerly; depraved appetites and passions crave their wonted indulgence: but they find a strong resistance to their impulse; they find the will determined on the contrary course; they find the soul bent to perseverance in it: before they can prevail, they must conquer this resistance; and before they can conquer it, resolution must have lost its force. The man who remains deeply impressed with his resolution to obey all God's laws whenever he feels himself in danger of a transgression, readily checks himself by recollecting, that it is inconsistent with the conduct which he has resolved to pursue. To every effort of irregular inclination, he can oppose the firm determination of the will; to every temptation to sin he is prepared to answer, I am resolved against it. Can it fail to be a great advantage, to have the heart thus steadily turned to virtue, and set upon the practice of it? In resolutions regarding common life, the advantage is universally acknowledged and experienced. We scruple not to dissuade a man from many things which he designs; but when we know that he is absolutely determined on any point, we confess it to be in vain to endeavour to dissuade him. And why should not resolutions in religion have equal influence? Only because we are not careful to render them equally firm.

From the habitual bent to virtue, as its object and its aim, which an explicit resolution of pursuing it impresses on the soul, there arises another great advantage. If it were possible that a man should employ himself in virtuous actions without any previous resolution of being virtuous, yet these actions could improve only the particular virtue of which they were immediate exertions. Acts of abstinence would improve the habit of temperance, but could add no strength to the habits of justice, benevolence, and piety: acts of justice or of charity would promote a just or charitable spirit, but

could contribute nothing towards forming the other parts of a holy temper. His progress would resemble the imperfect operations of human art, in which only one member of the work is shaped or polished at once, the other members remaining, in the mean time, rude and without form: while he were intent on improving one of the virtues of a good character, he could make no improvement in any of the other virtues. But when a firm resolution has devoted us to the practice of universal holiness, it gives the soul a fixed bias and permanent propensity to every part of holiness: we apply ourselves to every duty which there is an opportunity of performing, as a branch of the general plan which we have determined to execute; and in consequence of this, by performing it, we carry forward that whole plan. Every good action undertaken in accomplishment of a resolution of universal holiness, whatever be the particular nature of that action, strengthens the resolution, confirms the general bias resulting from it, and by doing so, renders us better disposed, not only to the virtue from which it directly proceeds, but to all the virtues which come within the compass of our resolution. We advance in the improvement of our hearts, in a manner similar to the perfect operation of God, who in every one of his works forms the rudiments of all the parts at once, and by one process extending its influence to them all, rears them together to perfection: firmly resolved to do whatever we know to be our duty, we acquire the beginnings of all the virtues at once; by every good action of our lives, we raise them all to a greater degree of vigour; we are secure against the danger of resting satisfied with partial goodness.

Thus, a resolution of holiness sincerely formed and carefully preserved, has great power to render us holy, by fixing holiness as an end which we must pursue, by presenting it to our view as our proper business, by predisposing the mind alike to all the parts of it, and by rendering the exertions of every virtue the means of cultivating universal goodness.

3. A virtuous resolution contributes to our practising virtue, by rendering the practice of it agreeable to us. This is the natural consequence of that habitual bias which resolution impresses on the

soul. Many things, no-wise painful in themselves, become disagreeable to us merely because we undertake them with reluctance, because they run counter to our present bent and inclination. The very same things will be accomplished with ease, and even prosecuted with pleasure, at another time, when they are undertaken of choice, and coincide with inclination. A resolution renders that our choice which is necessary for fulfilling it, removes our backwardness to engage in it, prevents the uneasiness which this backwardness would occasion in performing it, and makes it to fall in with the prevailing propensity of the soul. In common life, a thousand things appear impracticable when we first think of them, which nevertheless we execute with facility, as soon as a firm resolution has set our hearts upon them. A determined mind can support the hardest labour and surmount the greatest difficulties with alacrity and satisfaction. Irregular inclinations and corrupt affections render us averse to the restraints which religion imposes on them: we engage in it with reluctance; and therefore every step is difficult and unpleasant. A hearty resolution, if it cannot destroy our reluctance, provides a counterbalance to it: it determines our fixed choice to holiness; it makes us habitually solicitous to become holy; it renders us intent on practising it: we enter into it with spirit; we exert ourselves with vigour; and we feel pleasure in the exertion. When a temptation occurs, it excites the vicious passion to which it is addressed; this passion produces an aversion to the virtue which opposes it: but the general determination to all virtue, which resolution has impressed, combats this aversion, reconciles us to the restraint of inclination, renders it an *easy yoke* (Matt. xi. 30.), to which we submit with cheerfulness, and which we persist in bearing with alacrity and joy. David had resolved, *I will keep thy statutes* (Ps. cxix. 8.): What was the effect? *With my whole heart have I sought thee. I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word* (Ver. 10. 14. 16.). He had said, *I am thy servant* (Ver. 125.). The consequence was, *therefore I love thy commandments above gold, yea above fine gold. Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning*

all things to be right, and I hate every false way (Ps. cxix. 127, 128.). What we hate, we shall willingly employ care to shun; what we love, we shall joyfully take pains to obtain.

4. A virtuous resolution has great influence on our improvement, by putting us on the diligent use of all the means necessary for fulfilling the resolution. We should reckon it labour lost, to bestow a thought on the means of acquiring what we have no intention to pursue. It may be very valuable: but we have never proposed it to ourselves as an end; to what purpose then inquire, how it may be attained? But as soon as we have determined on the end, our thought is naturally turned to the proper means of promoting it. The end is so intimately connected with the means subservient to it, that, while that continues in our view, no effort is strong enough to prevent all attention to these: it renders us eagerly inquisitive about them; it suggests them to our notice; it forces us to dwell upon them; it makes us forward to apply them; and preserves us active and indefatigable in the application of them. Such being the acknowledged tendency of a fixed resolution, the resolution of virtue cannot fail to direct our solicitous concern to the means of becoming virtuous: *Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way?* (Ps. cxix. 9.) is the question which it impelled David to propose with earnestness; and it will lead every man, who has formed it with equal sincerity, often to propose the same question to himself with the like earnestness, and to enforce his attention to it with the greatest care. The means of holiness, it is not difficult to discover; they are clearly revealed to us: careful study of the divine law, fervent prayer for the divine assistance, circumspect vigilance against evil, unwearied diligence in every good action which opportunity permits; these are the direct and immediate instruments of virtuous improvement. That a virtuous resolution instigates to the use of these, almost every man may be convinced from his own experience; for there is scarcely any man who has never formed one good resolution. Recollect then: for some little time after you had formed it, did you not feel some disposition to attend to what you ought to do in order to fulfil it, to implore the grace of God for your assistance

ance in keeping it, to be upon your guard against what tempted you to the violation

it, to exert yourselves in some virtuous actions for which your situation gave an opportunity? Perhaps the disposition was of short continuance; with the generality it is, alas! of very short continuance: but if it lasted only for a day, it is sufficient for ascertaining the natural tendency and the proper influence of virtuous resolution. But if this be its genuine tendency, what reason can be assigned, why you are not always in this good disposition, but that you suffer your resolutions to wear off and lose their power? Did you, by frequently renewing them, preserve them in undecayed vigour, they would operate continually in the same manner, and with equal efficacy. It is plain, from the experience of the saints. David never recollects his holy purposes, or thinks of the subject of them, but they prompt him to use some of the means of holiness. *Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently: O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!* (Psal. cxix. 4, 5.) *I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly. O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.* (Ver. 8, 10, 11.) *I have said, that I would keep thy words. I intreated thy favour with my whole heart; be merciful unto me according to thy word. I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.* (Ver. 57, 60.) *Depart from me, ye evil-doers; for I will keep the commandments of my God.* (Psal. cxix. 115.) *I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: that I might guard against temptation; I was dumb with silence, I held my peace.* (Psal. xxxix. 1, 2.)

5. Finally: Virtuous resolution instigates us to virtue, by suggesting the motives to it, keeping them in our view, and fixing our attention on them. When a man is once determined, he not only represents to himself, in the strongest light, all the reasons which moved him to determine, but is at pains to search out reasons for adhering to his resolution, which never occurred to him when he was forming it. He will not be diverted from the execution of it, by much stronger arguments than would have been sufficient to prevent his entering into it. He is in-

genious in finding topics to justify it; he is anxious to confute every objection against his persisting in it; and if the resolution happen to be improper, he will often satisfy himself with the poorest sophisms, and the silliest evasions, rather than abandon it. What effect is then so great as not to be justly expected from a settled resolution to practise holiness? While it remains in force, it will lead us to meditate often upon all the motives to holiness: it will keep them perpetually in our view. But they cannot be perpetually in our view, without exciting us to perpetual diligence in holiness. They are so weighty, and of such eternal consequence, that nothing but inattention to them can prevent their governing the world. They are derived from every topic which can interest us; they are addressed to every principle which can actuate us. Duty, honour, utility; enjoyment in life, and comfort in the hour of death; present peace, and eternal happiness; conscience, gratitude, hope, and fear; all conspire in urging us to holiness. Before their combined force, all the most specious pleas of vice must vanish. In this one psalm, in what profusion are they suggested? in what striking lights are they placed? with what force, and with what efficacy, does David inculcate them upon himself? I remind you only of a few examples: *Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord. They also do no iniquity. Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments. The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver. All thy commandments are faithful. Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction. I will never forget thy precepts, for with them thou hast quickened me. They are ever with me. Thy testimonies are wonderful; therefore doth my soul keep them. Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded, are righteous, and very faithful. Thy word is very pure; therefore thy servant loveth it. Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth. Thy commandments are my delights. Thou hast founded them for ever. Great peace have they which love thy law; and nothing shall offend them. Lord, I hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.* (Psal. cxix. 1, 3, 6, 72, 86, 92, 93, 98, 129, 138, 140, 142, 143, 152, 165, 166.) By

rendering such views of virtue familiar, by keeping them continually present to the mind, a resolution, if it be but vigorous and steady, must urge us to virtue, with a force almost irresistible.

Thus I have endeavoured to describe the power of virtuous resolutions, and to point out the sources from which it is derived; by producing an obligation which we must fulfil, in order to avoid the humiliating sense of inconsistency of character; by fixing holiness, as an end which we must pursue, and impressing an habitual bias to it; by conquering our reluctance to the practice of it, and rendering it agreeable; by prompting us to the diligent use of all means of improvement in it; and by forcing all the strongest incitements to it, continually into our thoughts; they turn the heart to holiness, collect all the strength of the soul in this one design, and instigate, support, assist, and invigorate all its efforts to accomplish it. The practical improvement of this subject is obvious.

1. Since virtuous resolutions are such powerful instruments of virtuous practice and improvement, we ought to form them with the greatest sincerity, firmness, and care. The neglect of this is one of the principal causes of the corruption of the world. Men go on in wickedness, because they have never resolved to abandon it; they are at no pains to be virtuous, because they have never seriously thought of it. For a man's living in sin, it is not necessary that he make a formal choice of it; it is enough that he has not resolved against it; the strength of temptation, and the power of corrupt passions, will precipitate him into it. But for our practising holiness, for our persisting in it, notwithstanding all its difficulties, notwithstanding the depressions of infirmity, the impulse of corruption, and the allurements of temptation, it is indispensably necessary that we devote ourselves to it, and engage ourselves in it, by a fixed choice and resolution. This is the point from which steady virtue always takes its rise. In those who are recovered to virtue, after some time spent in open vice, the resolution to change their course must be very deliberate, formal, and explicit. But even when men have, by the blessing of God on a religious education, been earliest and most imperceptibly initiated into virtue, their virtue is owing to a real choice of it, instilled from the first, and

habitually preserved and acted upon. If our best resolutions cannot secure perfect purity and immoveable constancy, shall we conclude that resolution has no power? The conclusion would contradict the plainest experience of human life. We should conclude only, that our religious resolutions are too feeble; that the difficulties of religion, and the weakness and corrupt propensities of man, require their being formed with the greatest seriousness, and raised to the greatest vigour, and maintained in unexhausted force. If our goodness be defective, if our sins be many, notwithstanding all our pains to enter into, and to inculcate upon ourselves, resolutions of universal holiness, we must have been void of goodness, and profligate in sin, if we had never made one resolution to the contrary. It were folly not to avail ourselves of the great advantages which resolution gives for uniform and steadfast virtue. If it be undertaken early, it will prevent a great deal of corruption, and labour, and remorse, and misery; it will spread the happiest influence over all the periods of life. When we are capable of choosing our occupation for this world, it is high time that we make the more important choice of our occupation for the other world. If we are designed for eternity, and if without virtue it is impossible to be happy in eternity, we cannot too speedily, or with too great deliberation and seriousness, devote ourselves to the pursuit of all that is *true*, and *venerable*, and *just*, and *pure*, and *lovely*. (Phil. iv. 8.) This is the plan and model of life, which every man ought to prescribe to himself, which he should be determined to observe and execute, alone and in company, in prosperity and adversity, in every possible situation. Christianity demands it from all its professors. It requires it to be done in a manner the fittest for adding to its efficacy. It has instituted two sacraments for the purpose. It has enforced the frequent observance of one of them, by making it the subject of Christ's dying precept. It has provided, that as many as have not cast off all regard to the voice of their expiring Saviour, shall form and often renew the firm resolution of universal holiness, with the utmost deliberation and solemnity; with their souls for a considerable time kept intensely bent upon it; with a bright display, full in their view, of every motive to the exact fulfilment of it;

it; with their faith and honour, for the execution, plighted to their fellow-Christians; in a striking act of immediate worship, which gives it all the authority and energy of a religious vow, and is an appointed, and therefore a powerful means, of drawing down abundant showers of celestial grace, to nourish and invigorate it, and to raise from it the precious fruits of righteousness.

2. Having sincerely resolved to practise universal holiness, let us diligently and faithfully fulfil the resolution. From the power of resolution, this may reasonably be expected. We daily find men unalterably constant in resolutions of small importance. We find them inflexibly obstinate in evil purposes. Strange, that we should be irresolute only in that in which it is of supreme importance to be resolute and unmoveable; that in religion alone we suffer the force of resolution to be subdued by every foe! By allowing it to languish, without producing its effect; by neglecting to act upon it; by fainting in the accomplishment of it, we frustrate one of the most powerful instruments which religion contains for the reformation of our lives, and the improvement of our hearts; and we render ourselves in a great measure incapable of being profited by any of the rest. Excellent as it is, it is but a means of holiness; it derives all its value from its subservience to this end; it is labour lost, if it fail of promoting it. It is only for the sake of the execution, that the formation of holy purposes is enjoined. God will not accept of purposes instead of practice; he will not be satisfied with inefficient promises. His voice is, *Vow, and pay unto the Lord your God.* (Psal. lxxvi. 11.) True holiness is a stable and permanent temper, a continued

and persevering practice. *If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.* (John, viii. 31.) *But if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.* (Heb. x. 38.) *Look to yourselves, therefore, that ye lose not those things which ye have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward.* (2 John, 8.)

3. From what hath been said, we may learn to judge, whether or not our virtuous resolutions be properly formed, and properly maintained. You see what effects they ought to produce. They promote not our sanctification by an instantaneous charm. From every lapse, you have not reason to suspect either their sincerity or their permanence. If they fortify your sense of obligation; if they keep you habitually attached to holiness as the *one thing needful* (Luke, x. 42.); if they strenuously resist the corrupt propensities of the soul; if they prompt you to use the means of improvement with uniform diligence; if they render you forward to recollect, and to dwell upon, the motives to virtue; they have not been formed in vain. These are the energies by which they gradually and slowly mould the heart to holiness. Continue to cherish them, and, by the same energies, they will at last render you complete. But whenever they cease to produce these effects, they cease to act, they cease to be remembered. You must form anew; you must urge them upon your souls with greater vigour; you must excite yourselves with greater earnestness, to yield to their influence, and to fulfil them. *Be not weary in well-doing.* (2 Thess. iii. 13.) *Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.* (Rev. iii. 11.)

SECTION XVI.

FROM THE

SERMONS of HENRY STEBBING, D. D.

PREACHER to the HONOURABLE SOCIETY of GRAY'S INN, and CHAPLAIN
in ORDINARY to HIS MAJESTY.

SERMON I.

On private Prayer.

MATT. vi. 6.

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet.

AFTER leaving the public prayers of the church, our first retirement is into our families, beyond which there is a farther retirement into our closet.

Our Saviour says—*When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men: but thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet.*

The whole course of the advice, which our Saviour, in this chapter, is giving his disciples, upon almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, as it is directed against the hypocritical performance of these duties, so it must be understood as recommending a sincere discharge of them. Every advice against the abuse of any thing, supposes the proper use of it; and our Saviour's advice against the hypocritical abuse of private prayer, not only supposes but recommends the proper use of it.

The particular wants, and the particular blessings, whether temporal or spiritual, which each man feels belonging to himself, require the duty of private prayer. Public prayer comprehends all conditions of men, but distinguishes none; yet each man is truly distinguishable from the rest by the particular share he has in the general dispensation of things. He feels his wants and blessings as his own, though thousands feel the like. His sins are truly his own, though thousands are guilty of the like: and, in the common dis-

penensation of grace and pardon for sins, he feels his own particular need of both, distinct, though not different, from what others feel. There being then something particular, as well as general, in our nature and condition, the duty of prayer, which is founded on our condition, must have something particular as well as general in it: and therefore the method of using it must be private as well as public; because the public use of prayer being conducted, as it must needs be, in general forms, does not, alone, sufficiently answer the particular purposes belonging to the duty.

When we enter into our closets, it should be with a design of entering into our hearts; to reflect seriously and strictly on our condition, and the several circumstances belonging to it. We are there not only to acknowledge the goodness of God, but to consider how we have been indebted to it, and to thank him for his particular as well as general blessings. We are not only to confess ourselves sinners, but to inquire what and how great sinners we are—to call our ways to remembrance, and reflect with strictness on the sins which most easily beset us, and on the temptations by which we have been most easily betrayed into them; and not only resolve to avoid them, but consider by what proper steps we may effect it. These thoughts will naturally lead us, not only to ask for God's pardon and grace, but to apply for them in such circumstances particularly, where, upon a serious consideration of ourselves, we find we have a particular need of them. This is our business when we retire into our closets; which cannot be

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performed in our public devotions, or but very imperfectly; for though public devotion may admit of transient reflections on ourselves as we go along, it will not allow of such stops as are necessary for consideration.

But let us take a nearer view of the efficacy and advantage attending private prayer.

The efficacy of prayer in general is to make us good; as it is the means, appointed by God, for our obtaining that assistance of his grace, by which alone we can become so. But there is an effect arising from the use of private prayer, which has a peculiar tendency towards making and keeping us good; at least, it strikes us more forcibly in the closet than at church—I mean the sense of God's immediate presence and inspection over us.

We cannot indeed pray at church without a sense of God's presence and inspection, at least we pray very inattentively if we do; but then other objects are at hand to interrupt that sense: though we are before God, yet we are in company before him; and, I doubt, we often feel our behaviour more influenced by the company we are in, than by the Majesty we are before.

But when we are on our knees in our closets, we are not only before God, but we are alone with him, and can fix our attention no where but on him and on ourselves. In this situation we are strongly possessed of the sense, that God sees what we are doing, hears what we are saying, and knows what we are thinking; and, by frequently putting ourselves in this situation, we not only feel such sense whilst we are at our prayers, but we retain it afterwards, and feel it as a guard upon our conduct, whenever we are alone; for, whoever habituates himself to the persuasion, that God sees him when he prays in private, will be hard put to it, if he endeavours to persuade himself, that God does not see him when he sins in private.

Such religious care of ourselves in the closet, naturally leads to a good behaviour abroad. Out of the heart arise the issues both of life and death, of our good and of our bad actions; and, though vice is brought to maturity in public, it is conceived and nurtured in private. To

keep the heart then with all diligence, is our first and principal care; and the method, which is the most effectual for keeping the heart, deserves our first and most constant attention.

This method is private devotion; which, as it fills the heart with a sense of God's inspection over us, must cleanse it of such thoughts and purposes as are offensive in his sight. When men are thus prepared, they come forth, with great advantage, to the practical exercise of their virtue; and when they bring with them no evil thoughts from their retirement, to meet the temptations which arise abroad, they are less liable to be hurt by them. The sense of God's presence and inspection (which we are very apt to drop at sight of the world, and which we seldom recover in a crowd) becomes habitual, by the frequent refreshments of private devotion; and when we bring it into public with us, we feel it of singular weight in cherishing our good purposes, and in checking our bad ones; and, besides its own influence, secures the influence of another support of our good conduct, arising from our fear of shame; for, though this principle naturally operates towards keeping us regular, yet we see, by daily experience, that it is weakened in its operations, in proportion as we find means to deceive the judgment of the world, or to harden ourselves against it. But when, besides the judgment of the world, we have the judgment of God before our minds, we feel less encouragement for attempting to deceive the one, whilst we are sensible that we cannot escape the other.

It is surely from a neglect of the duty I am recommending, that we see, not only so much wickedness in the world, but so much inconsistency, unsteadiness, and levity, in the conduct of men. The use of private devotion, when rightly performed, strengthens our wisdom as well as improves our goodness—for a material part of private devotion is thinking; and they are mistaken who imagine it consists of nothing but praying. The mere recital of a form of prayer, whether in the church or in the closet, is neither the acceptable or the useful service; which should be attended with thoughts suitable to the occasion; and the thoughts which are both suitable and necessary for private

devotion, naturally tend to make us prudent, as well as good; as they are employed in examining our failures, and seeking the most effectual remedies for preventing them; in forming purposes of a right conduct, and considering the most proper steps for executing them. This is such sort of thinking as will, with frequent application of it, give a consistency and steadiness to our conduct—it prepares us for the world—guards us against the errors of it—and give us both strength and direction in the business of it.

It is to a want of thinking, that most of our misconduct is owing; and, was there no other advantage arising from the duty I am recommending, than that it puts us on this necessary employment, it would be well worthy our observance on that single account; but when to the employment of thinking, we join the employment of praying, as we do in our private devotions—and, after seriously considering what we are, and how we ought to act, we beg God's assistance to support and direct our resolutions, we then strengthen our prudence with religion; and, at the same time that we best prepare ourselves for the duties of this life, we are qualifying ourselves for the happiness of the next.

But when we run hastily into the world, without that preparation of thought, and guard of religion about our minds, with which private devotion would furnish us, we run to meet we know not what, and to manage what we meet, we know not how; every slight temptation staggers, if not defeats us; we fall into mistakes, or are betrayed into sin, and both wonder and are ashamed to find ourselves there: we make resolutions one hour, and break them the next; are serious or light, wicked or religious, according to the different complexion of the several objects, against which we are thrown. In short, we are tossed up and down in a crowd, without knowing where to go, or how to get there, pressed with inconveniences and in perpetual danger of mischief: and all this, from not setting out at first with religion and discretion at our side; which we might have had from our closet, and which would have conducted us with steadiness and safety through the crowd—would have shewn us, at once, the point we ought to make for, and have

taught us to walk up to it with constancy and attention.

If such then be the advantage arising from private devotion, that it furnishes us both with religion and discretion, and, by fitting us for the duties of this life, qualifies us for the happiness of the next, we see at what hazard we habituate ourselves to the neglect of it; since, if the use of it tends to make us discreet as well as good, the neglect of it must, in proportion, tend to make us otherwise. There are, indeed, the more is the pity, men of good sense and abilities, who despise this duty; yet such men, give me leave to say, would not disparage their abilities by saying their prayers; and, wise as they may be, they would be still wiser, if to their good sense they would add the best sense of all, a sense of religion; the want of which must follow a neglect of those means which are appointed for preserving it, and may expose them to the worst of mischief and of folly. Men may pride themselves in their own wisdom; but God would never have appointed the general duty of seeking his assistance by prayer, if it had not been generally needful for the wisest as well as the weakest among us; and the consequence of neglecting such appointment is commonly what we may well expect to see, which is, that those who fancy themselves strong enough to live without the assistance of God, soon learn to fancy themselves wise enough to live without a knowledge of him.

The short conclusion upon the whole is this: That the way to be happy is to be good; and the way to be good, is to seek after God for his assistance, by applying such means as he hath appointed for making us so; and, whoever sincerely desires to be good, will think, that the more opportunities he has for applying such means, the better, and will seek after God wherever he may be found.

He will seek after God at church, at home, in his closet, and on his bed—and will be careful not to go forth into the world, without taking God for his guide; who will lead him in the way in which he should go, and, with his arm, will conduct him, through the duties of this life to the happiness of the next.

S E R M O N II.

Christ's Manner of Life an Example
for our Imitation.

MATT. xi. 29.

Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly.

OUR Saviour's manner of life and conversation is an object, which cannot escape the attention of every Christian who reads the gospel history of him; and whoever attempts to describe it in other terms, must, in his description, fall as far short of that history, as, in his behaviour, he will fall short of the great example it sets forth. Yet a few practical remarks upon it may be within reach, and not without use.

1. The mildness of our Saviour's behaviour, is a striking circumstance in his character, and which well deserves, not only our notice, but our imitation. *A bruised reed shall be not break, and smoking flax shall be not quench*, is the description with which ancient prophecy sets forth his behaviour. A tender treatment and encouragement of those he came to save was, it is true, consistent; but not more consistent than it was amiable and exemplary. We, indeed, act otherwise; because we abound with what was totally wanting in Christ, that is, pride; and, unless we endeavour to divest ourselves of that odious quality, we shall in vain endeavour to imitate Christ.

Pride could not enter his breast, who was from heaven, and who laid aside the glory of it to live, as he did, upon earth; but it not only enters our breasts, who are from earth, but holds full possession of them. It is this quality of pride which is the foundation of our worst behaviour, and which spoils the lustre of our best. It is this which makes us restless, hasty, and overbearing, instead of that meekness and mildness which marked the character of Christ; which, as it flowed from the love he had for mankind, points at the true cause which makes our behaviour defective in those points. Did we really love each other, we should behave with mildness to each other; but till we feel the former, we shall hardly feel, however we may dissemble, the latter.

Mildness of temper may be natural and constitutional in some; and such will

be grievously blameable who suffer any thing to spoil them of so valuable a gift from their Creator; as others will be no less blameable, who, being made of more rough and fiery spirits, do not apply their reason and religion for smoothing and for quenching them; but think, that because they are natural they are blameless. In correcting our natural dispositions, every man hath his work, though different from the work of another; and he who is naturally mild, may have faults in him to correct, which the man, who is naturally rough, may have no concern with. This may be said, that whatever be the natural and different tempers of men, the mild man should study to preserve what nature has given him, as the rough man should study to acquire that, with which, though nature hath not given it, reason and religion will supply him. This he should do upon this plain consideration, that he is a Christian; and upon this plain command of his Saviour, *Learn of me, for I am meek*.

2. In our Saviour's conduct, benevolence and beneficence were blended with mildness; and so they will be in ours, though far short of what they appeared in our Saviour's. If the want of mildness makes men mischievous, the cultivation of it must make them benevolent. How closely beneficence may follow upon benevolence, is another matter; for beneficence arises not at once from the inward operations, either of a natural, or even of a religious temper, but from an outward supply of abilities: our Saviour's beneficence arose from divine abilities; and, so far, is inimitable by us, that we cannot do what he did; but this hinders not but that we may, and our duty requires that we should, do as he did; and that we should be beneficent according to our abilities, as Christ was beneficent according to his.

And it is obvious to see, distant as we are from the abilities of Christ, in how many instances we are enabled to imitate his acts of beneficence.

We cannot, indeed, heal as he healed; we cannot heal with a word: but the means which Providence hath put into our hands, and the many useful discoveries, to which he hath led the study and researches of men, are such, that even human skill may work, though not miraculous, yet most beneficial effects. We

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cannot teach as Christ taught; but the care which Providence hath taken for the preservation of the Scriptures, and of the Christian church, and the great improvement and extensive communication of knowledge among us, puts it in every one's power to be, more or less, capable of teaching others their duty. And though we cannot forgive sins, we may reclaim sinners, and lead them up to him who can forgive them. A sedulous application of these abilities, where we are called to the use of them, and a charitable application of them, as we have proper opportunity, are duties, by the performance of which we may imitate the beneficence of Christ, and for which we shall hereafter be rewarded by Christ.

There is, indeed, one thing in which (pardon the expression) we may go beyond Christ, in his acts of beneficence—I mean, in giving out of our abundance, in parting with our wealth to relieve and assist others. Christ had no such abundance; Christ had no wealth; when he fed the hungry, it was not money, but a miracle, that did it.

Christ used his own method of beneficence; what was peculiarly his own, and which we cannot imitate; and has left us to follow his example, by using such methods of beneficence as belong to us, but did not belong to him. It belonged not to him to build hospitals for the sick, who had, in himself, absolute power over all diseases: nor did it belong to him to give large donations of money to the poor, who was himself so poor, that he had not where to lay his head, and who applied himself to his own miraculous power for the payment of his tribute.

3. This naturally leads our thoughts to another consideration on Christ's manner of life, which was the meanness of it.

The particulars of this circumstance, in our Saviour's life, are too well known, and remembered by us all, to need reciting or enlarging upon. Christ lived thirty years, before he came forth to his ministry, in a mean family, in the meanest part of the country; and, after he came forth to his ministry, though he occasionally went up to Jerusalem, and visited other parts of the country, yet his home was Galilee, and his companions were fishermen. This condition of life Christ chose, that he might set mankind the example of a lesson, which they had

so much need to learn, and on the practice of which so much was to depend; even their salvation; for, as Christ himself came forth from the meanest country, and dwelt there, so a faith in his gospel, which is the salvation of man, must arise from, and continue, in humility.

The mean condition of our Saviour's life exhibits a very useful lesson, both to rich and poor; it teaches the rich not to glory in their condition, and it teaches the poor to be content with theirs. When we see Christ at his home, at Capernaum, or when we follow him in his journeys, from place to place, and observe his poor accommodation, we cannot help reflecting, that this was, not because Christ had no better, but because he chose no better; for when he came into the world, he came into his own, and all things in it, the best it can afford, were within his power; and, that he chose not the good things of the world, shews, not only that the good things of the world were not necessary for the work he came to do, but that they were improper; and if they were improper for his work, in setting his example before us, they must, at least they may, be improper for our work, in the imitation of that example: if so, what reason for glorying in the good things of this life? unless, what is too much the case, those who enjoy them be indifferent about Christ and his example; if they are not, they must blush to glory in their splendid suits of apartments, when they reflect that Christ had not where to lay his head. As, on the other hand, those who are in poor condition, will comfort themselves, at least will not complain, when they reflect, that they are sitting on the same bench with their Saviour.

Christ's contempt of the world is certainly a lesson well worthy our attention, whatever good things of it be set before us. We see Christ in his mean condition plainly pointing out to us, that the things about us here, whatever they are, are not those which call for our principal attention; the favour, the presence of God, and the glories of heaven, are our happiness: to this Christ points out, when he himself rejected the good things of this world; for, had they been our real happiness, Christ, who came on purpose to lead us the way to our real happiness, would not have rejected them, and, by so doing, have led us from them.

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This lesson for a contempt of the world, which is so necessary, is not difficult, if we would but think; but men are so employed in gratifying the senses, that, for a time, they will not think; and afterwards, perhaps, they cannot, or they dare not, think. By thinking, I mean thinking on what is to be our true happiness, and on its eternal duration; and how short, as well as how false, is the happiness, if we will call it so, which this world, even with the very best enjoyments it has, can furnish out for us. Christ rejected them; and if we cannot reject them with that superiority with which Christ rejected them, at least let us take good heed, if we value true and eternal happiness, that we do not set our affections on them, that we be not enslaved by them.

In his mean condition, Christ had nothing to do with what are called the pleasures of life; they belong, not, indeed, to that path of life which he chose to walk in; but had they belonged to his own work, or had they belonged to the true happiness of those he came to save, he would have been where they might be had. Can the men of pleasure think of this without suspecting, whether a pursuit after the pleasures of life, as it does not belong to their true happiness, may not be a hindrance to it? I speak not of those, in whom the pleasures of life have destroyed all sense of religion; they are out of the question; and, I trust, out of hearing; but can any of us, who have a regard for religion, and both wish and endeavour to be directed by it, when we look at Christ's manner of life and our own, whilst we are in eager pursuit after worldly pleasures; can we, I say, forbear asking ourselves—Am I imitating Christ? Much, I own, may be said in plea of innocent pleasures; but not enough to overthrow this truth, which is founded on our Saviour's example, and on our own experience, that worldly pleasures are not the proper object of a Christian's desire; and that, in proportion as they are pursued, they must, in a greater or less degree, hinder our pursuit after what is so.

4. Lastly, We may observe, that Christ, in his mean condition, not only rejected the good things of the world, and had nothing to do with its pleasures, but endured its affronts and reproaches; and

thereby hath set us a lesson of patience, as well as of humility. These are sister virtues, which ever walk hand-in-hand through life, to soften and subdue the evils of it; and happy are they who entertain these guests; but we cannot entertain the one without the other. If we would have patience, we must have humility; and if we have not humility, it is because we have not patience. A want of this virtue has evils of its own, and heightens those it meets; and we may well be thankful to Christ, who hath given us so striking an example of so necessary a virtue, thereby shewing us, how we should practise it, at the same time that he makes it our duty.

When we reflect on the treatment Christ met with from his townsmen of Nazareth, who reviled him for his preaching, and were ready to throw him headlong from a precipice, we have hardly patience to read, what he had the patience to bear. Christ withdrew himself from the affront, without repentment.—Hence we learn how to set by, what meets us in every path of human life, ingratitude and insolence; and whoever cannot bear both with patience, is likely to have a troublesome passage through life; and derives no other benefit from his impatience, than that it naturally tends to shorten his passage.

The patience of Christ, under the natural inconveniencies belonging to a mean condition, shewed itself, not merely in bearing them; for his disciples bore them too; but in his voluntarily undergoing them, and bearing them, when he had it constantly in his power to relieve himself; and is a circumstance in Christ's conduct, which should make us ashamed of our own, when we refuse to put ourselves to small, or even great, inconveniencies for the assistance of others: as his patience under the barbarous treatment he met with from the Jews, and the death he suffered on the cross, is a lesson, wrote in the strongest characters on the Christian mind, for our patience in bearing the severest afflictions; when we reflect, that we are then drinking of the same cup, of which Christ himself drank so largely for our salvation.

S E R M O N III.

On Diffimulation.

ROM. xii. 9.

Let love be without diffimulation.

A MUTUAL love of each other is a principle as necessary as it is amiable; without which, those duties of society, which we can claim of each other, will lose much of their merit, and those which we can better wish for than demand, will lose all the strength that supports them; for to be just and honest only upon the principle of self-love, makes men at best but inoffensive members of society; and, if it saves them from the hatred, hardly procures them the esteem of others; but the amiable and voluntary duties of humanity and benevolence are quite impracticable, where we feel not a love of others to direct and to support them.

This principle belongs to our natural constitution, nor can we disclaim it without forfeiting our character as men; but it is more particularly our duty as Christians, nor can we disclaim it, without forfeiting our title to the kingdom of Christ.

But though we dare not disclaim this principle, we may dissemble it; and the Apostle's advice in my text, contains a dissuasive from this practice; though, like many other topics of Christian advice, it hardly suits the prevailing taste and temper of mankind.

Diffimulation is the first lesson we learn; and, as the world goes, the man who has no diffimulation, ought to have no business here. We see it take possession of the heart, as early as nature and reason can begin to plant any sentiments on which it may employ itself; but we are so well pleased with the discovery of reason in the young breast, that we take no distaste at the misapplication of it; and, when we consider them as stepping forth into mankind, we are hardly inclined to disarm them of a weapon so necessary for their defence. With this encouragement, diffimulation grows up with our natural faculties, and imperceptibly insinuates itself into the most valuable parts of our behaviour; and, from being indulged in little matters, claims the management of

greater. There is scarce a character in life in which it is not to be found; but we dignify it with the name of prudence, and, persuading ourselves it is a virtue, we think the cultivation of it both necessary and commendable.

But, whatever we may think fit to call it, diffimulation is truly a moral vice; and, whatever pretences may be raised to shew its expediency, there can be none brought to justify it. It is true, men will often make a mischievous use of the sincerity they find in others, and by that means lay hard inconveniencies upon the open practice of it; but whoever concludes from hence, that diffimulation is justified, holds forth this maxim—that whatever is expedient is morally right; a maxim which will reach farther than the defence of diffimulation, even to the defence of the greatest crimes that can be committed. If honesty be a moral virtue, diffimulation must be a moral vice; nor can the frequency of its practice, or the greatest advantages arising from it, ever alter its nature: much less can we make it a virtue, merely by calling it one.

This vice, then, of our nature, thus established and encouraged, spreads its influence over every virtue which belongs to society; and as the love we owe to others is our best title to their esteem, and to the benefits attending it, it immediately seizes that for its object, and goes to work with great alacrity and with too much success.

Dissembled love assumes as great a variety of shapes, as real love has offices belonging to it. It affects courtesy and esteem, both which are reasonable and useful duties, when sincerely and properly applied; but when falsely pretended, or improperly applied, they become odious and mischievous: in the former case, they are a suitable reward and encouragement of good actions; in the latter, they too often lead men into weak, if not wicked ones, by humouring either their vanity or their vices. Honest love observes a reasonable measure and just propriety in the courtesy and esteem which it expresses, without which observance every duty loses its merit. The courtesy which gives what is due, and in the manner it is due, gains as well as bestows esteem; but when immoderately or improperly paid, it does neither: it be-
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flows no esteem; for when men are profusely loaded with more courtesy than they can think justly belongs to them, they will suspect the sincerity even of that which is their due: nor does it gain esteem; for under the suspicion, that the courtesy which is paid wants sincerity, men are more inclined to take distaste at it, than they are to think him a friend who pays it. Dissembled love transgresses both against measure and propriety, in the courtesy and esteem it pretends to shew; upon this maxim—that all men are uneasy at receiving less respect than they think is due to them; few think they receive more than is their due; and fewer still are displeased, if they do think so.

Hence arises flattery; a hurtful practice, however pleasant, either to him who receives it or to him who gives it. To feed men with more praise than they are sensible they deserve, entices them to be less careful in making true merit their title to it; it is like being paid our wages before we do our work, and is as likely to make us idle. It requires nice judgment to feed men properly with commendation; a weak mind will be surfeited with even a moderate share of it, and some will better bear the disgrace which they have not deserved, than they will the praise that is their due. In short, praise is the support of merit, as food is the support of life; and the same care is necessary in the distribution of both, else we surfeit the merit we should encourage, and destroy the life we should support.

Nor is the mischief of flattery confined to him who is the object of it: it is reflected back on him who gives it. For he who lavishly and indiscriminately bestows that commendation which is due only to merit, shews himself no friend to the latter; and, in being accustomed to set aside its authority in distributing his praise of other men's actions, is naturally betrayed to set it aside in conducting his own, and will be apt to expect he may acquire praise at the same easy rate at which he bestows it, without deserving it.

But the worst mischief in flattery is, that it not only surfeits the virtues, but encourages the vices and follies of others; not content with loading men's virtues with more praise than they can carry, it

softens their vices, and makes them appear less odious than they really are. The flatterer's aim is to please the person he is addressing, and therefore he will use any means agreeable to that end; and the vices and follies of men, when artfully handled, may be the surest means of procuring their favour, because a commendation of their virtues is felt only as the payment of what is due; but a mitigation of their follies is felt as an indulgence: the former will either find their own way to applause, or will be contented without it; but the latter want assistance to countenance them: and whoever removes the shame and uneasiness attending folly, which is the flatterer's aim, very strongly bespeaks the favour of those to whom it belongs.

These mischiefs, then, dissembled love works in the common offices of civility; but it is then most hurtful, when it creeps into the sacred offices of friendship; these are of greater importance, and we feel ourselves much more sensibly hurt by false friendship, than by unmeaning civilities or servile flattery.

It is on friendship we depend for a supply of that mutual assistance, which we want in pursuing and maintaining our happiness. Man, considered as an individual, is an indigent helpless creature, nor can he put forth a hand to reach his share of natural good, without the aid and concurrence of his fellow-creatures. This is not so properly a defect in our constitution, as it is a circumstance, which adapts us to the condition in which our Creator hath thought fit to place us; who, intending us for society, that we might be dear to each other, has made us useful to each other; and, after ordering that we should seek our natural happiness by a mutual assistance, has suitably adapted us with such affections as may lead us to give, and to deserve, that assistance.

Friendship, then, is a natural human affection, and, as such, must be an universal one; and yet, if we look into mankind, we may perhaps be inclined to think it is not so, and that there is too much reason to complain at the want of it: but we are to remember, that man may misapply the natural affections which God hath implanted in him; and therefore, a want of the suitable effect, which any affection should produce in any particular

ticular instance, does not prove the absolute want of that affection, which may exert itself on other more improper objects, which a depraved judgment may recommend, instead of those which reason and duty set before it.

It is thus with the affections of love and friendship; they are natural, and they are universal: no man is destitute of them, though too many misapply them: perhaps there are few who are not chargeable with a want of them in some particular instances, were they are justly due. The mischief lies here—our affections are not so obedient to the direction of reason as they ought to be; so far from it, that they often conspire together to throw reason from her just monarchy, and to set up a republican government of their own, in which each passion takes its turn, in claiming a privilege of leading the rest; hence it is, that, instead of seeing the several affections produce their suitable effects, by being employed on their proper objects, we see them produce nothing but mischief, by being misemployed; and even the amiable affections of love and friendship, like the honest members of a disordered polity, are overborne in the stream of confusion, and are thrown on objects, which, in a regular government, they would have avoided.

Friendship, then, is a natural and universal affection; and, consequently, it will be an easy matter to counterfeit it in particular instances; for, as there is scarce any man but what really feels it in some instances, so he will thence be qualified for dissembling it in many other instances, where he finds occasion, though he feels no sense of it. And, as it is easy to counterfeit friendship, so it must be highly mischievous to do it; for what is intended for the best purposes, by abuse, becomes productive of the worst; and, if the use of friendship be directed to promote the happiness of mankind, the abuse of it must be followed by unhappiness and disorder.

Dissembled friendship traffics for the services of others, without giving any in return, and beguiles men to trust their happiness in our hands for the improvement of it, when we are disposed to neglect, if not abuse, such trust. There need not more be said by way of charge against this practice; and that this is not too

much, will appear from considering the employments of dissembled friendship, and the motives which support them.

S E R M O N IV.

The same Subject continued.

ROM. xii. 9.

Let love be without dissimulation.

I. **I**T is one employment of dissembled friendship, to be lavish in professing services, without any thought or design of putting them in execution; and one motive which supports this sort of practice is vanity.

It is making ourselves considerable, to have others expect what may promote their happiness from our hands. We are naturally fond of superiority, and of having others dependent upon us; and this purpose is better served by soothing, than by satisfying the expectations they may have from us: the soothing their hopes keeps them our slaves; but satisfying them, makes them their own masters, if not ours too. A generous breast, indeed, feels pleasure in gratifying the expectations of others; but it is pain and jealousy to the selfish heart, which is well pleased to see others pine for what they want, but is alarmed to see them gratified.

This sort of vanity, which feeds upon the disappointment and dependence of others, is very apt to divert, as well as feed, itself at their expence. Outward professions are as fit for one as they are for another: and, where there is no principle of sincerity in those who make them, which fixes them to one, no remorse is felt in giving the same to another. Thus they dress out numbers with their promises, and smile to see them mistake their livery for finery.

We usually find men of this disposition among those, who are already furnished with a competent, if not an affluent, share of what the world calls happiness. Are they then too much employed in the enjoyment of their own good, to be really solicitous in advancing the good of others? or do they aim only at bribing the enmity of the world by fair professions, not caring to purchase its friendship by real services? But, surely, it is a weak heart, that cannot step forth from its own enjoyments,

ments, to assist the happiness of others ; and as weak a judgment, that leads men to think themselves secure, by tying up the enmity of the world, when there is no condition but what feels, and may want, the benefit of an active friendship from it. The happiest condition is precarious ; and those only stand the longest, which are the last assaulted by adversity. A prudent man in the best state, will make provision for the worst ; and, whilst he has it in his power to purchase real esteem from mankind by real services, will lay up a store of friendship, against a time when he may want it. As for those who would purchase the friendship, or at least would bribe the enmity, of the world, by fair professions only, the best that can be said of their bargain is, they pay a trifle, and they purchase one : mere profession of friendship will purchase only mere profession of esteem ; the real esteem of the heart can never rise to thank the unmeaning friendship of the tongue.

II. There is another employment, in which dissembled friendship is engaged, when it leads us to an execution of our professions, but no further, and with no other view, than the answering some ends of our own.

Men of this turn may do real services, but they fall short of the character of true friends, because they act not upon the principle of friendship ; they do not, so properly, serve another, as make use of another's good to serve themselves. Not that it is wrong so to do ;—to make ourselves happy, by making others so ;—it is the general condition of our nature ; and we are put in each other's way for that purpose, to be mutually used as instruments in promoting each other's good. But the blame lies here—when the principle that leads us to do good to others is no other than a desire of serving ourselves, for then what we do is an action, not of friendship, but of prudence. The love of our friend, and the love of ourselves, are affections as distinct as the objects on which they are employed ; and though they may often operate together, yet they are distinguishable, and that by the end at which they aim. The love of our friend distinguishes itself by our aiming at his good, as its ultimate end ; but when we carry our views farther, and only take in his good, as subservient to our own, it is plainly the love of ourselves

that influences the action, and the good we do another is no more than an accident that falls in our way.

It may be no easy matter to guard against this sort of dissimulation, and it may perhaps seem too strict a remark upon it. We must form our judgments by the actions of men, and cannot always look far enough to see the real inward principle which conducts them ; we therefore must allow him to be a true friend, who claims that title upon real services, whatever may be the unknown motive on which he did them. There is no contradicting this—and yet there is this mischief arising from it, that, so long as we know the general necessity which mankind are under of judging by this rule, we are apt to grow careless of acting by any other, and, as improper motives of action cannot well be discerned, we grow less solicitous for acting upon proper ones.

Would we impartially consult our own sentiments, in the discharge of many duties of friendship, we might find reason to own, that there are actions, which we are well content to hear ranked under that sacred title, which yet do not properly deserve it ; and if we seriously pursue the reflection, we must be sensible, that the blindness of others in giving us a character we do not deserve, does us as much mischief as it does us honour : such success encourages the growth of a selfish principle, which is naturally luxuriant : a successful practice in serving our own interest, carried on under the reputation of serving our friends, may in time make us too fond of the former, to pay any regard to the other : when we have long made it a rule to promote the good of others, only as an instrument in promoting our own, we may in time as readily promote their mischief, when we see it conducive to the same favourite end.—This leads me to,

III. A third employment, in which dissembled friendship is engaged, when, under the profession of advancing the good of others, men make use of the means and confidence reposed in them for a contrary purpose, and work the mischief of others by those steps, through which they pretend to lead them to their advantage.

It is a sufficient reproach to our nature as men, and to our condition as Christians,

ans, to contrive the unhappiness of others by any means; but it is a much higher reproach to both, when our contrivances are so laid, as to make others the instruments of their own mischief.

By whatever fatality it comes about, we are always better guarded against others, than we are against ourselves; and the caution which leads us to suspect others, is generally attended with a confidence which betrays us to ourselves.

In consequence of this general foible in our judgment, it will be a general rule with those who intend us mischief, to profess themselves our friends; because by this means they get possession of us; we put ourselves in their keeping; and if we were not inclined to suspect our own conduct before, we are less likely to suspect it now, when we have persuaded ourselves that we are under the protection of another, of whose judgment we entertain perhaps a better opinion than we have of our own. Every one sees the advantage which the false friend has from this important trust. In this situation we mistake his judgment for our own, and think we only give our own wishes birth when we give approbation to his proposals; and, whilst we are fondly persuaded that we think and act in him, we are not very likely to censure or suspect what he directs. This situation necessarily makes us an easy prey; and, as it makes him an easy spoiler, so it makes him a cruel one; for what can excuse him in the character of a man, who makes another undeservedly miserable? Or what can save his character as a Christian, who returns the basest sort of enmity for friendship?

To conclude—Friendship is a sacred post, in which (if I may be allowed the bold expression) God dignifies man with his vicegerency. Whoever feels it in his power to be a friend to others, may look upon himself as honoured with a commission from God, to co-operate with him in his general design of doing good; nor are such abilities of being a friend to others greater marks of favour and honour, than they are directions of duty; and when we are called to give an account of our commission, we shall fall under the character of unthrifty stewards, if, like the talent in the napkin, we return them unemployed.

But under what character shall we fall, if we return them much abused? If those

means, which God hath lent us for the assistance and service of others, be employed, not only for promoting our own wrong ends, but for disappointing the reasonable ends of others?

So reputable as is the post of friendship, it is no wonder, that many are desirous of being ranked in it, who are not qualified to fill it; but, so sacred as is the post of friendship, it is matter of wonder (of concern at least) that those who are called up to it, and are qualified to fill it, should with so much indifference desert or prostitute it—that they should so easily satisfy themselves with an unmeaning barren profession of it, or, without remorse, allow themselves in a selfish dishonourable practice of it—that they should so cruelly, as well as profanely, misapply the sacred post they are in, by inviting others to trust the means of their happiness in their hands for its improvement, when they are not only not disposed to apply them, but are industrious to abuse and misapply them. Men know not how to guard themselves against such enemies to God and to mankind, till their mischief, perhaps their ruin, makes them feel their mistake. So long as the heart of man lies buried from the eye of man, we must run a hazard with each other, and venture our happiness in each other's hands; but the necessity of this conduct aggravates the guilt of those, who are disposed to betray us by it. To make the necessary behaviour of another the means of any inconvenience to him, is base and ungenerous, even in the lightest matters; but where friendship is concerned, and such happiness as this world can afford us is depending, it is unmanly, it is unchristian. God knows, the happiness which this world can afford us, is poor enough at best, even after all the assistance we can give each other for procuring and maintaining it;—surely, then, we should not contrive to make it still more imperfect, by laying treachery and malice in each other's way, to disturb and to destroy the little enjoyment allotted us here below.

Let the false friend, if he can, consider this. If his heart be open to any thing besides his own interest, let him look around him on the mischief he is doing others, and be ashamed; or, if his heart will admit no consideration, but what leads to his own interest, let him look

look forward, on the mischief he is doing himself, and be affrightened. Let him seriously consider, whether the disappointments and unhappiness of others, in which he sports himself, on which he fattens here, are circumstances that will secure him his own happiness hereafter; or, whether it be not reasonable to suspect, if there be a God who judgeth the earth, that the treacherous wiles he lays for others may at last ensnare himself; that the smooth speeches, by which he beguiles his neighbour, may be heavily repaid with a dreadful sentence against himself, from an angry, but righteous judge; and, that every instance of mischief, which he works for the innocent here, may recoil upon himself, and sink him deeper in his own destruction hereafter.

S E R M O N V.

Duty of applying our worldly Advantages for the good of Others.

LUKE, xvi. 8, 9.

The Lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

THE intent of this advice is to direct us so to apply our present worldly advantages, that we may make them productive of greater advantages hereafter.

The form of expression made use of in this advice, seems to confine it principally to the management of riches; which, with great propriety, may, for many reasons, be styled, *the mammon of unrighteousness*, or false mammon: but, though the manner of expression be particular, the sense of the advice is general, and reaches to every worldly advantage we enjoy; the least of which, by a proper application, may be made productive of greater advantages hereafter.

This world sets before us our work, the next sets before us our reward: and all the benefits of life are entrusted with us, to be managed for the honour of God, and for our own and others happiness.

We are every day liable to be removed from this trust; and therefore should, every day, employ it to the best advantage.

If we are not always liable to be removed for mismanagement, yet the condition of our nature makes the continuance of our trust precarious.

We discharge our trust in the benefits of life, when we do all the good we are able in our respective stations.

The abilities of doing good in human life are various; nor is any man so scantily furnished with them, but he is capable of doing some good, if he be placed within reach of a proper object. It is therefore a lesson of universal extent—to be doing good.

The mere corporal abilities of man qualify him for this work, and we may do good by the labour of our hands.

The intellectual abilities of the mind raise us to higher offices of service, and qualify us for doing good in a more extensive manner, by the exercise of ingenuity and wisdom.

External abilities will set us at work in doing good. Among these, what principally furnishes us with opportunities of doing good, is wealth. From hence, as from their root, arise all other external abilities in life; and even natural and intellectual abilities, though they do not spring from hence as from a root, will require it as an assistance and support.

How to make a right use of wealth, is no problem in theory; but it is somewhat hard to be reduced to practice. The temptations for abusing it increase with the enlargement of it, and the more we have, the less we know what to do with it.

The miser makes himself a slave to that which is given him to command: he sacrifices his public virtues to get at his wealth, and his private ones to keep it. Instead of making himself friends hereafter, by the use of his mammon, he makes himself enemies, even here, by the abuse of it: for, it is an abuse of wealth to make no use of it, as well as to make a bad one; since either method runs contrary to the true design with which it is given us.

The profligate takes the other extreme; and, as the former makes himself a slave to his wealth, so this makes his wealth a slave to his lusts and passions. The one adores what he should command, the other tyrannizes over what he should make his friend; and, by setting it upon the worst services, makes it incapable of assisting.

assisting him in the best. Both these sort of men, by abusing the means they have of making themselves respected here, and happy hereafter, live in contempt, and die without hope.

Within these two extremes, then, we must look for those who use wealth with propriety and to the best advantage. Yet the search may be more troublesome than successful.

Even in this part of mankind, licentiousness will lead great numbers to misapply the abilities they have from their wealth; who, though they have prudence enough to stop its encroachments upon their necessary substance, yet let it run away with the superfluities of it; such are ready to assume commendation in their conduct. Yet, why? Their care of their necessary substance is, indeed, a discharge of one duty; and is so far commendable, as it shews a proper regard for their own and their family's welfare; but there remains another duty, of equal obligation—which is, after taking care of ourselves, to take care of others. This duty is lost in a licentious application of our abundance; which is given us for the benefit of others, and is abused when otherwise directed. It is by assisting the happiness of others, that we must promote our own; and he falls short of the point to which our Saviour's advice directs us, of making friends by this world's mammon, who only secures a present welfare, but dissipates the means by which he should secure a future one.

Besides licentiousness, pride exerts a great sway in the disposal of our superfluities; and this principle works with the greater effect, as it often works protected by the grave authority of worldly prudence. Pride will stamp a necessity upon several parts of our conduct, and under the title and authority of worldly prudence, will lead us to dispute the directions of spiritual œconomy, and to be more solicitous for carrying an imaginary importance here, than for establishing a substantial interest hereafter.

Pride assumes a wider sway in the management of our superfluities, and looks farther in the disposal of them, than licentiousness does. He who is directed by licentiousness in the use of his superfluities, looks no farther than himself; but pride will look down into posterity, and direct its aim to an imaginary object of gratification. No man, I hope, is anxious

for having his heirs as vicious as himself; but many are too anxious for having them as splendid. On this principle, superfluities are hoarded up for the abuse of those who are yet unborn; and, when we have already as much as becomes our station, with as much besides as our own pride can dispense with, the superfluity is still withheld from its proper use, and we turn our backs upon those opportunities for doing good with it which Providence sets before us, that we may support and feed the pride of future heirs.

As we have learnt to call this sort of conduct raising or ennobling a family, so it passes with approbation. But, where is the prudence, in resigning the means we have of doing good, into the hands of those who may neglect or misapply them? When God gives us more than we want, he always sets before us the objects to which he intends the superfluity should be directed: by a compliance with such appointment, we do God honour; we procure ourselves esteem here, and a reward hereafter. We cannot bequeath these to our heirs. We cannot transfer to them our duties, and the advantages arising from the performance of them: they are our own, and we alone are answerable for a neglect of them. It should seem therefore enough, if a man leaves his heir as full means of doing his duty as he himself has had; and a good man may well say, with respect to his heir—If he proves like me, the same estate which has supported me, will support him; and, if he proves otherwise, there is no reason that I should feed and promote his licentiousness at my expence. It is certainly too much, when he sacrifices his own duty, and the advantages arising from it, only to put his heir in a way of neglecting his likewise.

If we look into the common event of these over-zealous provisions for future heirs, we shall hardly find it deserving the character even of worldly prudence. We see families sink faster than they rise; and, what was intended for their strength and honour, proves their shame and destruction. It is a circumstance observable in the politic as well as the natural constitution of men, that it is made with a certain degree of strength, adapted to the services it is intended for. Both may be overloaded: and we frequently see men sinking under a weight of wealth, which their ancestors have heaped upon them, who might have carried their own acquire-

acquirements with steadiness and esteem. So short-sighted is man—and so watchful is the eye and hand of Providence, he will not suffer his general blessings to be monopolized; but, when, to aggrandize a name and family, we for a while engross the substance we should dispense about us, Providence over-rules our project, withdraws us from our shining heaps, and scatters them in the next generation.

Such considerations upon the disposal of our superfluities in a wrong way, should direct us to a right method of applying them. Instead of making ourselves contemptible, if not hurtful, by consuming them upon our lusts, or to indulge our pride, we should make ourselves both useful and respected, by setting them out for the assistance and benefit of mankind. Instead of dissipating our treasures upon earth, or laying them up only to leave a name behind us, and to feed the moth or the profligate, we had better apply them for procuring a name where we are going, whither our good deeds will fly before us, and will bespeak us an applause which shall continue, when even the gilded dirt of this perishable globe shall be dissolved.

The opportunities of doing good are distributed through human life in such variety, that it looks as if Providence would tempt men to the observance of this duty, by suiting the objects of beneficence to the different tastes, as well as to the different abilities, belonging to us. Objects of beneficence meet us in every path of human life; and there is that propriety, that pleasure, that advantage, in applying ourselves to this duty, as most strongly recommends it.

1. As to the propriety of this duty.—Since God has not set all mankind on a level, but has distinguished them one above another, in different stations, it is manifest what is the duty of man in the station in which he is placed; that he does not stand in a high one, to intercept the benefits of Providence from those beneath him, but to reach them down to such as stand too low to reach them for themselves. Without this use of high stations (which the good man will make of them), they are not worth the acceptance of a wise one. He who is intrusted with honour and wealth, carries a light for the benefit of those behind him who have none; but if he does not apply it to this

use, he only carries a light, to shew contempt and reproach where to strike.

2. The heart-felt pleasure attending this duty will not admit description. Those who have not tried the practice of it, would not understand it; and those who have tried it, feel more than description can set before them. The pleasure is such, that we are often hurried in the pursuit of it, beyond the rules of prudence; and lose the apprehension of our own mischief, in our eager zeal for another's good. If, then, the pleasure in doing good be such as tempts us even to imprudence, it is certainly sufficient to persuade us to a prudent cultivation of it: for, surely, when we have looked round upon all the pleasures which this world's contents can yield, when we have surveyed all the actions by which we can improve our own happiness, we shall find none so effectual as those which promote the happiness of others; nor is there any thought which fills the soul with a more steady and pure delight, than that which tells us we are benefactors to mankind.

3. Then, for the advantages arising from a discharge of this duty, they are such as concern both this life and the next.

As to this life: besides the obvious temporal advantages which flow from the general love and esteem of mankind, a proper disposal of our worldly abilities conduces much to our moral improvement in virtue and religion. For it is our Saviour's own observation—*He who is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much. If, therefore, ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?* He who applies his temporal abilities properly, is not likely to misapply his spiritual ones; and a natural step towards our improvement under the latter, is to make a good use of the former; for there is a close connection between doing good and being good. The same disposition which leads us to assist virtue in others, naturally leads us to cultivate it in ourselves; and, as every single act of beneficence fills the soul with complacency, a constant habit of it will so compose and rectify the heart, as to make it fit for the impression of every virtue that can adorn or can improve it.

As to the next life: our advantage is great and glorious, where, after having

been faithful in that which is another's, in that which could be no otherwise a benefit to ourselves, than as we made it so to our fellow-creatures, we shall be rewarded with that happiness which shall be truly and eternally our own. This world, and all that we admire in it, shall fleet away; and, like the bird or arrow that flieth, leave not its track behind: nothing shall remain of all its wealth and splendor, but those fair deeds which we have wisely extracted from the use of them. These, indeed, shall remain, and shall carry us to the gates of heaven, where unspeakable joys shall be opened to our view: the testimony of those who have shared our benevolence, shall plead for our admission: the hearts which we have cheered under the heavy gloom of earthly affliction, shall sing our entrance on the regions of eternal bliss; and, in exchange for the glittering dirt we lent them here, shall point out our bright abode in heaven; where angels shall conduct us to the throne of mercy with joyful acclamations; and the Son of God receive us with this high applause—*Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord.*

S E R M O N VI.

On the Duty of religious Reflection.

PSALM cxix. 59.

I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy statutes.

THE Psalmist here, by his own example, recommends a duty well worth our notice and imitation—the duty of religious reflection.

The duty is not discharged by a mere general reflection that we are sinners; which is but a momentary act of the mind, and is as ineffectual as it is transient. The most hardened sinners often feel this reflection forcing itself upon them; and their hardness lies in this, though they feel themselves forced to think thus far, they will not chuse to think any farther.

The work of religious reflection is a work of more time; and, at first view, has very much the appearance of a difficult, disagreeable, and frightful work: for which reasons we are very apt to decline undertaking it, or to falter in our

execution of it: but the more we feel ourselves afraid of this work, the greater need is there for our setting about it; for it is with our spiritual, as with our worldly accounts, when men are afraid to look into them, it is a sure sign they are bad. This leads many into distress; and, I fear, too many to the grave, without a suitable preparation for it; for in this, as well as in other important circumstances, *the children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light.* Though many are ruined, through fear of looking into their accounts, yet we see more surmounting this fear, to save this temporal good, who yet submit to it at the hazard of their eternal welfare.

All the difficulty and disagreeableness of this work arises from the neglect of it; we set about it late, and find it difficult and disagreeable to look on days that are passed, because we have neglected to look at them as they passed; as men, who neglect to keep their current accounts clear, find more difficulty in stating them at last.

Yet, notwithstanding the apparent difficulty or disagreeableness of this work, resolution and perseverance will shew us comfort and advantage arising from it. The Psalmist shews us the general good effect arising from it—I *thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy statutes.*

If this duty leads to a reformation of life, wicked men have the strongest reason to set about it; and when we find even the holy Psalmist declaring himself the better for it, good men will not think themselves unconcerned in it; for, though they may not want reformation, they may, however, want improvement, which is best procured by religious reflection, and is hardly to be procured without it.

Under this double advantage then, of reforming the bad, and improving the good, the duty of religious reflection becomes a general duty, and offers itself to the observation of all.

The short and only rule, in applying ourselves to this duty, is what we find laid down to us in the first exhortation to the communion. It cannot be laid down in better words—that 'we examine our lives and conversations by the rule of God's commandments; and whereinsoever we shall perceive ourselves to have offended, either by will, word, or deed, there

there to bewail our own sinfulness, and to confess ourselves to Almighty God, with full purpose of amendment of life.'

In reflecting on our past conduct, we are to look at that rule, which Christ hath given us to walk by; his precepts, his promises, his threatenings, as they are laid down to us in the Gospel. This is the rule, by which Christ will judge us; and, therefore, it is the rule by which we should examine and judge ourselves.

We should not make the fashion and judgment of the world the rule, by which we are to judge of our moral and religious conduct. The world excuses many things, which Christ's Gospel condemns; and, whoever carries his reflections upon himself no farther than to inquire, how far he meets with the approbation or reproach of men, is not only short, but may be very wrong in his reflections, and may be deceived to sit down contented, not only without doing what he ought, but after doing what he ought not.

In the work of religious reflection, our business with the world is not to consider how we may be judged by it, but how we have used it. The world is not our judge; it is not so much as the rule of our duty; it is but the means through which we apply ourselves to what is the true rule of our duty; and, by the right use of which, we may approve ourselves to him, who is the true judge of our conduct.

The world has no more ability, than it has right, to judge us; it can only judge us by appearances, and upon comparison; and this makes so many of us study to save appearances, and to be content with the comparative merit of being better than some others about us; for it is natural to guide our conduct by the nature of the judgment we submit to: from seeing the world judge by appearances, we quickly learn to live by appearances; and those who are loth to look beyond the judgment of the world, must be sensible how easily they may impose upon it; which is the very reason they are so ready to be determined by it. But it may not be—there is a higher judge, who will pass a stricter judgment on our behaviour, who *seeth not as man seeth*; but *trieth the heart*; and who will approve or condemn us, not according as we are better or worse than others, but according as we have neglected or fulfilled the duty he hath set before us.

In the work, therefore, of religious reflection, we must turn our attention from the judgment of the world, with which, in this matter, we have nothing to do, and look into our own consciences; the judgment we meet with there, upon comparing our conduct with our true rule of duty, may be worth our attention, as it is a foretaste of the judgment we shall meet with hereafter. If our hearts condemn us in this examination, it will be of no weight or comfort to us, that the world acquits us; which, in many cases, is ready to exact less of us than our duty requires, and where it does not, is most easily deceived.

Yet, in this inward search of our own consciences lies, perhaps, the worst part of the difficulty. We are almost as ignorant of ourselves as the world may be ignorant of us. We are as ready to lower the demands of duty, as the world can be to indulge us in it; and we are as busy to deceive ourselves, as we are to deceive the world about us. These circumstances, then, in our condition, call for two very necessary things in the work of religious reflection—they are diligence, and impartiality.

We are ignorant of many things in our past conduct. Some faults, as they may make but small impression when they are committed, are not laid up to be remembered; others stay longer, but escape at last; and some there are, which the mind is industrious to turn out of its repository—yet all must be provided for by serious repentance. This, therefore, calls for diligence in a survey of our past conduct.

Whoever sets about this work, will find his inability in making a complete review of all his offences before God, and will have reason to cry out with the Psalmist—*Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O cleanse thou me from my secret faults.* There will be occasion, I say, for this reflection and petition, even after the most diligent examination we can make of ourselves; which is a reason, not for discouraging our attempts, but for increasing our diligence in the work; lest, to the number of those offences which we cannot recollect, we add the much worse number of others, which we will not recollect; in behalf of which we cannot, with any propriety, use the Psalmist's petition, and ask to be cleansed from our secret faults; which may well be meant
of

of such faults as we cannot find, but not of such as we will not look for.

The imperfection of our faculties will hide many of our sins from our view; yet, upon a diligent inquiry, we shall find ourselves able to recollect more than we care to look at: we shall find ourselves able to recollect our more eminent and grievous transgressions; these we are not so unable as we are unwilling to recollect.—Yet why unwilling? The horror we feel on this occasion, if we rightly consider, lies not so much in entering upon such recollection, as in avoiding it; for there is no horror in recollecting our past sins, whilst it is yet in our power, whether they shall hurt us or not; and this is in our power, so long as we have opportunity of applying for pardon to the mercy of Christ, with true repentance and full purpose of amendment: and, surely, there is no horror in applying to the mercy of Christ for that pardon, which he is both able and ready to bestow, and which he has promised to grant. Lastly, where is the horror in forming full purposes of a better course of life, after a sincere repentance and distaste for the former?

Our sins thus provided for, and a diligent though imperfect search made into our past lives, we may venture to beg of God, that he would forgive us our negligences and ignorances; such failures in our duty as have not followed from a love or habit of sin; but which the frailty of human nature hath led us both to commit and to forget. Such failures, though they have escaped our notice, yet deserve our care; for, being real offences against God, they do not lose their guilt, because we lose sight of them, but must be provided for as such. And even in this part of our work, though we cannot do all, yet it is owing to our indolence that we do so little as we do; for I doubt it may with more truth be said, that we hide our faults, than that we cannot find them.—However, we should do what we can in this matter, and do it sincerely; which will not only help us to more discovery than we are aware of, but will give us a better title to God's mercy for such as we cannot discover. After using our best strength, God will excuse our weakness; but to put our plea wholly upon the latter, without applying the former, is wrong and presumptuous. To beg of God to cleanse us from our secret faults,

will be of no amount, whilst our open sins stand unthought and unrepented of; and to think that God will grant us his pardon for the latter, whilst we will not give ourselves the pains to recollect them, is an expectation, if not too much for the mercy of God, yet vastly too much for the unworthiness of man.

In short, and to conclude—In your religious reflection, *seek, and ye will find*—both sins and mercies—Knock, and the door of salvation shall be opened to you—Kneel, and be forgiven.

S E R M O N VII.

The same Subject continued.

PSAL. cxix. 59.

I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy statutes.

BESIDES diligence in recollecting our offences, we should use honesty and impartiality in judging of them.

We are apt, not only to shorten the number of our offences, by taking no notice of many, but also to mitigate the guilt of those which remain, by taking too favourable a notice of them. We are very fond of setting down many of our offences under the title of trivial ones. It is very true, our offences are not all equal; but we should be very careful how we accustom ourselves to think any of them not worth our notice, which is the usual consequence of making this distinction; for we call some offences trivial, not meaning that less care or less repentance is due for them, but that they deserve none; which is manifestly wrong, if they are offences, and which draws this pernicious effect after it—that, by accustoming ourselves to esteem trivial offences as nothing, we learn to esteem great ones as less than they are.

We should always remember, that, as God hath given us the faculty of judging our behaviour, so he has given us the rule by which we are to judge it; and that, whilst he leaves us to judge ourselves, he does not exclude his own judgment over us; but directs ours to be governed by it. The judgment we make of ourselves is not our final judgment; but is subordinate to his judgment, which will be so, and is no farther a safe judgment, than as it agrees with that; and this is known by its

its agreement with that rule of duty which he hath set us.

Whenever, therefore, we are inclined to judge favourably of our offences, as we must be sensible that we are not the only judges of the matter, so we should be suspicious, whether our own judgment will agree with his, who is above us. This will, of course, send us to examine the judgment we make by that rule of duty which is laid before us. Whatever part of our conduct disagrees with that, is an offence; and, as such, must be provided for by true repentance: nor will it be of any amount to call it a trivial offence, if, by giving it such title, we mean to excuse ourselves from repenting of it; for, though in other respects our offences greatly differ from each other, yet they all agree in this respect, that they all require repentance and amendment.

But we are apt, besides judging favourably of our offences, to judge favourably of ourselves, and to make ourselves easy with our reflections on our wrong behaviour, under the notion that we are frail, weak, and imperfect creatures. This is very true; but can never be admitted, as, of itself, sufficient to excuse our offences, without a sincere repentance and amendment. For, weak as we are, we are capable of doing what God expects from us; and though it be true, that we fail of a constant steady obedience, and that the cause of this failure lies in the frailty of our nature; yet the pardon of it must lie, not there, but somewhere else; namely, in that appointment which God hath set for the pardon of all our offences, through the merits of Christ, upon our sincere repentance.

With this appointment before us, it is absurd to think, that the frailty of our nature is, of itself, sufficient pardon for our offences; for why then has God thought fit to appoint another method or reason for pardoning them; and, having appointed another method, what occasion have we to lay hold on the frailty of our nature, as a plea for pardon, when we may, if we please, lay hold on a much better of God's providing? Nay, rather, what affront is it to the goodness of God, and how dangerous for ourselves, when God has appointed a remedy for our frailty, to expect, that our frailty itself, without that remedy, shall sufficiently plead for us?

We should, therefore, be cautious how we depend upon that, as an excuse for

our bad conduct, which is but the cause of it. The frailty of our nature is a reason of complaint; but no reason of justification: it is a very bad reason for being indifferent about past offences; but a very good one for being more cautious in our conduct for the future.

But there is still another step, by which we are very apt to deceive ourselves in the work of religious reflection; which is, by vain arguments of our own, about the nature and merit of such actions as we are desirous to excuse, because we are loth to give them up. Some part of our conduct, a favourite part, lies open to exception, and, upon comparing it with the express directions of Christ's gospel, it appears to be wrong; we presently wish it were allowable, and as presently set ourselves at work to make it so; we reason about it—as we call it; that is, we search for all the fallacies our wit can suggest, to conceal or disguise what we do not care to look at: it is natural to believe as we wish, and we soon bring ourselves to believe such conduct allowable, as really calls for repentance and amendment. But what is all this? Has Christ set a rule of duty before us, and strictly enjoined our observance of it, and, after all, are we obliged to observe it only so far as we judge to be reasonable? that is, in short, only so far as we feel agreeable to us; for reason there can be none in attempting to make that allowable which Christ hath forbid. Men may pervert themselves, and puzzle others, by such vain attempts; but the truth still lies open to the honest understanding. Christ's commands are plain things; facts in conduct are plain things; whether the facts agree or disagree with the commands, may be plainly seen; if they disagree, not all the subtle reasoning in the world can ever make them agree, or can set aside the necessity of repentance and amendment.

One thing should never be forgot, which yet, perhaps, is not often remembered, in the work of religious reflection; which is, to reflect, not only where we have done amiss, but where we have omitted doing well; to consider the means of virtue we have neglected, as well as the means of vice which we have applied, and to take the goodness and forbearance of God into consideration, as well as our own sinfulness and obstinacy. These are circumstances, which, though they aggravate our account, must yet be taken into it, to make it a true account.

For

For we are placed here, not only under a prohibition against sin, but also under a command to pursue goodness; and God hath set before us the suitable means for such a work, as his mercy both gives and prolongs the opportunities of applying them. These must be part of our account; these are talents committed to our trust, which must be returned improved.

Doubtless it aggravates the sinner's account, that, in proportion as he has been following the wages of sin, he has wasted the talents of righteousness committed to him; and that he has not only despised the authority, but the mercy, of God: and, as this aggravates his account, so it heightens the necessity of his repentance and reformation; unless we think it indifferent with how great an account on our heads we stand before the tribunal of Christ.

It is surely right to diminish our account; before we are called there; and, in proportion as we find it a heavy one, to be the more speedy and anxious for lightening it, by a timely repentance and reformation.

Nor is it less suitable that we should have recourse to this duty then, when we have occasion to look up for his assistance under any present state of difficulty and danger; it being as presumptuous in sinners, impenitently such, to ask and expect God's blessings, as it is not to be afraid of his judgments. In our present state, we have great reason to ask God's assistance against our enemies; and that he would blast those purposes, which, should they ripen to event, would prove a judgment upon us, too heavy for our heads, though not too heavy for our sins. In proportion as we want divine assistance, we should qualify ourselves for asking it; and our qualification must be the same which David had recourse to, when he sought the favour of God—we must *think on our ways, and turn our feet unto his statutes*. Whether we look around us, or within our own breasts, there is enough to think of; and we are gone so far astray from God's statutes, that, upon turning our feet towards them, we must take many steps to recover them.

Our cause is good; and, if we make ourselves so, we shall assuredly find God so. But this is not to be done by lamenting the general wickedness of the times; a lamentation, which every one is ready

to join, without considering how much he himself contributes towards making them so. Lamentation has no effect; nor has repentance a sufficient one, without reformation; which must be brought about, not by reproaching others, but by each one's amendment of himself. This, indeed, is a work, the complete performance of which we may not expect from the perverseness and obstinacy of man; but, such is the goodness and mercy of God, that the few who sincerely turn themselves to him shall prevail, for averting those judgments, which, but for their sakes, would fall on the many who will not turn and seek after God. Ten righteous men, had they been found in it, would have saved Sodom. God, in the dispensation of his providence, often withholds his judgments on the wicked, from a regard to the good, who are mixed among them; and suffers the tares to continue, because he will not root up the wheat with them; thus encouraging the good, whilst, at the same time, he allows the wicked opportunity for their repentance.

Notwithstanding the general wickedness, dissipation, and inattention to religion, which, it must be owned, do strongly mark the present times, yet there are many among us, who love and fear God, and attend to his religion, though there may be more who neglect, perhaps despise, both: and, though there are many among us, who are busy in contriving, and would rejoice in effecting, the ruin of their country; who, with the malice of disgusted ambition, first bring war to our gates, and then treacherously obstruct the success of it; yet we have those, and enough of them, who love their country, and have both courage and integrity to stand forth in its defence.

Let us hope, then, that, for the sake of those among us who love God and their country, the Almighty will lift up himself to our assistance on this occasion; that he will strengthen the hands of those, whose hearts are ready in our defence, and give us the blessing of success—reserving his judgments for those who are disposed to betray us: and, let us trust, that, if we diligently seek him, and turn our feet unto his statutes, God will still say to our Sion, *I am thy salvation*, and to those who love his name—*Be strong, and establish your hearts, all ye who trust in the Lord*.

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